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ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY

SPRING—
SUMMER
1971

EDITED BY

"Ellery Queen"

DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 229 PARK AVE. SOUTH
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EDITORS' NOTE

Dear Reader:

This is the 21st in *EQMM*'s series of original paperback anthologies, now published twice a year. . .

In the preceding 20 volumes we emphasized the threefold nature of our story categories—what might be called, if you'll pardon a high-flown phrase, a trinity of metaphor. "Three" and "triple" are still the key concepts of our editorial approach. For example: surely each of these anthologies can be compared to a luxury ocean liner, a sort of literary cruise ship—a three-decker, of course. Your reading of each anthology is a vacation journey that takes you away from the work and worry, the stresses and strains of day-to-day living. Metaphorically, you set sail on the first page of text and enjoy, we hope, an interesting and exciting voyage, reaching your destination more than 300 pages later.

Which brings us to another "triple" similarity: each of these 21 anthologies can also be called a three-decker in the book sense. Each volume has contained approximately 140,000 words. Most mystery novels these days contain only 45,000 words, sometimes less. Thus, every anthology in this series is the equivalent in number of words of 3 full-length mystery novels. Thus, every anthology, including this one, is a contemporary three-decker of the best detective-crime-suspense fiction, by the best writers in the mystery genre, and is offered at what today is truly a bargain price.

So, once again, we give you—

(1) short novels, novelets, and short stories about world-celebrated series detectives such as

Georges Simenon's Inspector Maigret
the Lockridges' Captain M. L. Heimrich
Erle Stanley Gardner's Sheriff Bill Catlin
Charles B. Child's Inspector Chafik
Ellery Queen's E.Q.

(2) non-series stories of detection and crime by such recognized masters of mystery as

John Dickson Carr
Cornell Woolrich
Victor Canning
Anthony Gilbert
John & Ward Hawkins

and (3) mystery stories by such internationally famous literary figures as

H. G. Wells
Orson Welles
J. B. Priestley
Philip Wylie
Damon Runyon

And once again, as in the earlier 20 three-deckers, we have striven to achieve our triple editorial objective: first, every story must meet the standards of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* as maintained these past 30 years—top quality or top professionalism of writing, and second, superior originality or superior craftsmanship in plotting; and third, none of the 3 short novels, 3 novelets, and 10 short stories in this book has ever appeared in any of the 60 anthologies previously edited by

Ellery Queen

Erle Stanley Gardner

A Man Is Missing

Even though Perry Mason is not present in this Erle Stanley Gardner short novel, complete in this volume, "A Man Is Missing" is one of Mr. Gardner's best stories. And one of the reasons is that Mr. Gardner was just as much at home—just as authoritatively at home—in the back country of Idaho as he was in a metropolitan courtroom. Indeed, one of the most effective things about this short novel is its authentic background—the details of Western scenery, the sensory particulars of the wide, wild, big-game country. Erle Stanley Gardner knew his outdoors from first-hand experience: trail riding, camping, the guides and wranglers, the dudes and tenderfeet—and especially the country Sheriffs.

Now, read about a man subject to amnesia attacks who once left his office at five o'clock in the afternoon, started for home, disappeared, and showed up three months later without the slightest notion of where he'd been or what had happened. And now he has done it again—vanished a year ago, sent his wife one picture post card (addressed to her in her maiden name!), and hasn't been seen or heard from since . . .

Detective: SHERIFF BILL CATLIN

SHERIFF BILL CATLIN spilled the contents of the envelope on his battered desk and glowered at the younger man across from him who sat uncomfortably attentive.

"The trouble with these dudes," the Sheriff said, "is that they think out here in

Idaho we ain't civilized. Now, here's Ed Harvel, the Chief of Police that was visiting out here three years ago. He wants me to locate an amnesia victim, and he writes me a two-page letter telling me how to go about it."

Hank Lucas nodded vaguely as the Sheriff's steely eyes

looked up over the top of his spectacles.

"Now, this here chap," the Sheriff went on, "had a previous attack. He wandered off on his own. Was gone for three months, came back, and didn't know where he'd been. Never has been able to remember a thing about it. Didn't know what he'd done, what name he went under, where he lived, or anything about it. He just left his office five o'clock one afternoon and started for home. He showed up three months later. Ain't that a heck of a note?"

"That," Lucas agreed, "is a heck of a note."

"Now then," the Sheriff went on, "a year ago he did it again. Disappeared last September. But this time he writes his wife a picture post card. Sends it to her 'way back last October."

"Hey, wait a minute," Hank said. "If he sent his wife a picture post card, his mind hasn't gone plumb blank. How did he know where to address it?"

"I'm coming to that," the Sheriff said. "That's the funny thing. He'd been married three years, but he addressed the post card to his wife under her maiden name and sent it to the old address where she lived when he was courting her. Been

married to her and still thinks she's his sweetie-pie."

Hank didn't say anything.

"Now, this here Ed Harvel," the Sheriff went on, "I guess he's a bang-up Chief of Police back East, but you put him out here and he's just a dude. Had him into the Middle Fork country three years ago, and there wasn't a single tenderfoot trick he didn't pull—even to getting lost. Now, when he writes to me, he tells me what he wants done, and then goes on and tells me how I should do it. You'd think I'd never done any investigating at all. Suggests this chap, whose name is Frank Adrian, is still going under his own name, because he signed the post card 'Frank.' Says it might be a good plan to check with the banks to see if he's opened an account, talk with the proprietors of some of the stores in town, go search the back country, and—"

"Ain't that all right?" Hank asked.

The Sheriff snorted. "It's the idea of him telling me how I should go about finding the guy! Anyhow, I don't think that's the best way to do it."

"No?" Hank asked.

"Nope," the Sheriff said positively, and then added, "Funny thing about dudes—"

"You said you wanted to see me official, Bill?" Hank inter-

rupted, shifting his position uneasily.

"Now, don't get impatient," the Sheriff said. "A man would think you'd been shooting meat outta season and was afraid you'd left a back trail."

"You'd ought to know how it feels," Hank said. "I can remember before you was elected when—"

"Now this here amnesia guy," the Sheriff interrupted hastily but authoritatively, "seems to have gone over in the Middle Fork country and lived in a cabin. He had a camera, and someone took his picture standing in front of his cabin. It was sent to his wife—addressed to her, like I said, under her maiden name, Corliss Latham.

"The post card was mailed from Twin Falls, and darned if they didn't waste a lot of time corresponding with the folks down in Twin Falls. Then finally someone suggested it might be the Middle Fork country, and it seems like the man who is in charge of the missing persons department found out Ed Harvel had been out here three years ago. So he goes to Ed and asks Ed for the name of the Sheriff. And instead of writing a letter of introduction, Ed takes over and writes me the whole story and—"

"You wanted to ask me

something about it?" Hank interrupted.

The Sheriff pushed the photographic post card across the desk. "Take a look."

Hank looked at the card. On the side reserved for the message was written: "Corliss, dear, this shows where I am living. It's the wildest, most inaccessible place you can imagine. I still feel the results of that auto accident six weeks ago, but what with climbing around these mountains, living on venison and trout, getting lots of fresh air and exercise, I'll be fit in no time at all."

The card was addressed to Miss Corliss Latham.

Hank turned the card over and studied the photograph of a mountain cabin, with a man standing in front of it smiling fatuously at the camera. "Auto accident?" Hank asked.

"According to Ed Harvel, that accident was three years ago. The date on the card shows it was sent about six weeks after the guy disappeared the second time. Apparently he got his head banged in that accident, and whenever his memory slips a cog, it goes back to the time of that accident. Everything after that is a blank."

Hank studied the post card.

"What do you make out of it?" the Sheriff asked.

"A trapper's cabin," Hank said, "up on a ridge. It was built in the fall. You can see where the trees were chopped off around near the cabin—indicates there was about three feet of snow on the ground. The guy's sure a tenderfoot."

"He is, for a fact," the Sheriff agreed.

"Those high boots," Hank went on. "Hobnails in 'em, too. Bet they weigh a ton. Look at that hunting knife hanging on his belt. Pretty far front. No protection on the sheath. He'd go hunting, jump over a log, double up when he lit, and the point of that knife would run through that leather sheath right into his leg and cut the big artery. Then we'd have another dead dude to pack out . . . What makes you think the cabin's around here?"

"Notice that little 'T M' in the corner?"

Hank nodded.

"That's Tom Morton's initials. He puts 'em on the post cards he prints, with a string of figures after 'em. I don't know just what the idea is, myself. But I've seen those sets of figures on picture post cards Tom makes of the fishing country and places around town. Tom printed that post card, all right."

"You talk with Tom?" Hank asked.

"Nope, I was sorta waiting for you."

"Why me?"

"Well now," the Sheriff said, "you see, it's like this, Hank. I want you to sorta help me out."

"Now, wait a minute," Hank said. "The way you're talking, Bill, you've gone and made some arrangements."

"Nothing out of the way," Sheriff Catlin said hastily. "I've got you a couple of customers. A couple of dudes."

"Who?" Hank asked.

"Seems like this Corliss Adrian has all of a sudden got in a helluva lather to get her husband located. Seems like there's another man been hanging around, and maybe she'd like to get a divorce. To do that she'd like to make a charge of desertion and serve papers. Or, in case she's a widow, then she could get married again right away. This here new man has got lots of money, and he's willing to spend it. He wants results quick. And the high-powered city detective who's been in charge of the investigation, a chap by the name of James Dewitt, has a vacation coming up. So he and this Corliss Adrian are driving out together, and they wanted—"

"Absolutely not," Hank said. "I can't—"

"They'll pay regular dude prices," the Sheriff finished triumphantly.

"Well—" Hank hesitated. "That's different. How about the other guy, the one who wants to marry her? Is he coming?"

"Course not," the Sheriff said. "He's keeping under cover, hugging the ground like a spotted fawn and hoping no one sees him. He's the rich son of a big broker back there. Lots of dough and political influence—chap name of Gridley. His dad's a pal of Ed Harvel's, and that's partly why Ed's all worked up. You can see the thing from Gridley's viewpoint. S'pose they locate this husband and his mind's a blank, or maybe he's just checked out of marriage because he's tired of it. But he gets a lawyer and starts a suit for alienating affections or some such business. Nope, Gridley's son is sitting just as still as a pheasant in a grain patch."

Hank said, "Well, I've got my pack string where I *could* take a party into the Middle Fork. Of course, I don't know what sort this city detective is, and—"

"Let's you an' me go to see Tom Morton," the Sheriff suggested.

The Sheriff and Hank Lucas

left the wooden courthouse and went out into the sun. The sprawling Idaho town was deceptive to those who didn't know it. A single long main street stretching in a thin ribbon of frame business structures, many of which were in need of paint, gave little indication of the innate prosperity of the place.

For a radius of more than fifty miles, cattlemen used the facilities of the town to service their ranches. Business from a county as big as some of the Eastern states flowed into the county seat. The bank, housed in a one-story frame structure, casually discussed financial deals which would have jarred many a more pretentious city bank to its granite foundations.

The Sheriff and Hank Lucas turned in at Tom Morton's doorway. The entrance room was bleak and cold, decorated with pictures of familiar faces, young men in uniform, girls at the time of high-school graduation. Here and there were hand-colored photographs of the mountainous back country.

Ignoring the sign, "Ring for Photographer," the Sheriff and Lucas clumped noisily along the uncarpeted corridor toward the living quarters and the dark-room in the rear.

"Hi, Tom," the Sheriff called.

"Hello," a voice answered from behind a door marked, "Darkroom."

"This is the Sheriff. Whatcha doin'?"

"Just taking some films out of the developer. Stick around a minute, and I'll be with you."

Making themselves entirely at home with the assurance of people who live in neighborly harmony, the pair moved on into the living room, settled down in chairs by a potbellied stove which oozed forth welcome warmth, and waited for Tom Morton to emerge from the darkroom.

A few minutes later the photographer, tall, thin, wrapped in an aura of acid fixing bath which gave him the odor of a dill pickle, said, "What can I do for you boys?"

Bill Catlin showed him the photograph. "You make this post card, Tom?"

"Gosh, I don't know."

"Ain't these figures in pen and ink up in the corner yours?"

The photographer took the print, turned it over, and examined the figures in the upper right-hand corner. "That's right," he said.

"How come?" the Sheriff asked.

Morton grinned. "Well, if you guys have got to know something that's none of your

business, I don't have a very big margin in this business. All photographic stuff has an expiration date put on it by the manufacturer. That's the limit during which the manufacturer will *guarantee* it's okay. But stuff will last for months or even years after that if it's had the right kind of care. And once the expiration date is past, you can pick it up cheap if you know where to go.

"Well, last year I had a chance to pick up three or four lots of post-card paper on which the expiration date had passed. I put figures on them so I'd know which lot was which, in case I had to discard one. Sometimes just before the paper begins to go bad, the prints get a little muddy. But I was lucky. I didn't have any trouble at all."

"So you're sure this was a print you made?"

"That's right."

"Try and think when you made it."

"Gosh, Bill, have a heart!"

"Take a good look at it," the Sheriff invited.

Morton studied the post card, while the Sheriff regarded him anxiously. Hank Lucas, having tilted himself back in his chair, put his boots up to the arm of another chair and perused an illustrated periodical.

Morton examined the figure on the post card, said, "Say, wait a minute. I'm kind of beginning to remember something about *that* picture."

"Atta boy," the Sheriff encouraged.

Morton said, "There was something funny about it...

Yeah, I remember what it was now. The guy wanted just one print made."

"What's so funny about that?"

"Well, when people want a picture put on post cards, usually they want at least a dozen, to send to friends. This fellow came in and said he wanted one print made, and only one."

"You developed the film? Or do you remember?"

"No, I didn't. That was another thing. He brought the film with him, all developed. And he handed me this one post-card-size film and told me to make one print on a post card. He said he wanted to send it to his girl."

"Remember what he looked like?"

"He was the guy in the picture."

"Well, now, that's interesting. Probably along about last September?"

"I thought it was earlier. I thought it was sometime in the summer."

"Couldn't have been in the summer," the Sheriff said. "Must have been in September."

Morton studied the pen-and-ink number on the upper right-hand corner of the post card, said, "I didn't think the stuff was still on hand in September. This was a batch I got around April. I thought it was gone by August. Guess I'm wrong, though."

"Well, we got the date on the post card and the time of the man's disappearance," Lucas said from behind his book.

"He went off the beam. Had amnesia. His wife's looking for him. You wouldn't remember anything about him—the name he gave or anything of that sort?"

"Gosh, no. Along during the fishing season I get a lot of work from dudes, and I just keep the names long enough to deliver the pictures."

"Well, Tom, just make a photo of this here post card and make us half a dozen prints right quick. Can you do that?"

Tom Morton looked at his watch. "How soon you want 'em?"

"Soon as I can get 'em."

"Don't know why I asked," Morton said, aggrieved. "You been making that same answer to that question ever since you been Sheriff."

As the two men went clump-clump-clumping out along the board corridor, Hank Lucas said to the Sheriff, "You know, Bill, if that fellow'd been in the Middle Fork country ever since last fall, I'd have known about it. He could have gone in for a month or two and holed up in a cabin somewhere, but—let me see that description again."

Catlin passed over the description from Ed Harvel's letter.

"Five feet nine," Hank said. "Age thirty-two. Weight, a hundred and eighty-five pounds. Red hair. Blue eyes. Fair complexion. Freckles . . .

Shucks, Bill, he hasn't been in the country very long. And if he went in, he didn't stay."

"I know," the Sheriff said soothingly, "but this here Ed Harvel, he thinks the only way to make a search is to go into the Middle Fork and prowl up and down the country looking for this cabin."

"The cabin," Hank said, "can probably be located. It's up on a ridge, was built by someone who had a line of traps, was started in the fall before there was any snow on the ground, and finished after there'd been a storm that brought in about three feet of snow. You can tell where the stumps were cut close to the

ground and then higher up. And those last saplings that stick out over the door to hang traps and stuff on were cut off five feet above the ground. The stumps are right near the cabin."

Bill Catlin grinned at him. "I wouldn't say anything like that to this detective that's coming out, Hank."

"Why not?"

"Well, now," the Sheriff said, "it's a funny thing about city detectives. They think they're the only ones can do any of this here deductive reasoning. They don't realize that all that police work is just following a trail, and that a cowboy has to do more trail work in a day than a detective does in a month. This here Dewitt is goin' to pose as a sportsman, but he's going to be playing old eagle eye. And if you steal his thunder, it might not go so good."

Hank grinned. "Me? I'm just a rough, tough old cowpoke turned wrangler. How long's it been since this Gridley guy got to hangin' around?"

"Now, that," the Sheriff said, "is something Ed Harvel didn't tell me about. You ain't s'posed to know a thing about Gridley, Hank. And don't treat this dude like a detective. You're s'posed to know you're lookin' for a cabin and a guy that's missing, but this detective

will probably be posin' as a dude friend of the family."

"That makes it easy."

The woman who left the noon stage and entered the hotel was slender-waisted, smooth-hipped, self-reliant. She seemed to have confidence in her ability to accomplish what she set out to do and to know exactly what it was she had in mind.

There was about her the stamp of the city. Obviously, she was in unfamiliar surroundings as she stood for a moment glancing up and down the street with its variegated assortment of frame buildings. Then she raised her eyes to look over the tops of the structures at the background of high mountains. At this elevation and in the dry air, the shadows, with their sharp lines of demarcation, seemed almost black as contrasted with the vivid glare of the sunlight. Rocky peaks stabbed upwards into the deep blue of the sky, dazzling in their sunbathed brilliance.

Abruptly conscious of the fact that the stage driver was watching her curiously, she walked smoothly and unhesitatingly into the hotel, crossed the lobby to the desk, nodded to Ray Field, the proprietor, who had taken his place behind the counter to welcome incom-

ing guests, and took the pen which he handed her.

For a brief moment she hesitated as the point of the pen was held over the registration card, and Ray Field, knowing from long experience the meaning of that momentary hesitation, cocked a quizzical eyebrow.

Then the woman wrote in a firm, clear handwriting, "Marion Chandler, Crystal City."

Ray Field became sociably communicative. "Lived there long?" he asked, indicating the place she had marked as her residence.

Ray Field kept that particular approach as an ace up his sleeve for women who registered under assumed names. Experience had taught him that there would be one of two responses. Either she would flush and become confused, or she would look at him with cold, haughty eyes and take refuge behind a mantle of dignity.

But this woman merely gave him a frank, disarming smile. Her steady hazel eyes showed no trace of embarrassment. She said, in a voice which was neither too rapid nor yet too hesitant, "Oh, I don't really live there. It just happens to be my legal residence." She went on calmly, "I'd like something with a bath, if you have it. I

expect to be here only long enough to make arrangements to pack in to the Middle Fork country. Perhaps you know of some packer who is thoroughly reliable."

Field met those steady, friendly eyes and acknowledged defeat. "Well, now, ma'am, the best packer hereabouts is Hank Lucas. As a matter of fact, he's starting in to the Middle Fork country tomorrow, taking a party in—a man and a woman. Just a chance you *might* get to team up with them—that is, if it was agreeable all around. You could save a lot of expense that way. Of course, you'd want to be sure that you were going to get along all right together. You might speak to Hank."

She hesitated.

"The other two are due to arrive sometime this afternoon," Field went on. "Man by the name of Dewitt and a woman named Adrian. If you want, I'll speak to Hank."

"I wish you would."

"He's in town and I—"

Field broke off as the door was pushed open, and Marion Chandler turned to survey the loose-jointed figure in tight-fitting levis and high-heeled boots that entered the lobby.

"This is Hank now," Field said in an undertone.

"Seen anything of my dudes?" Hank called out.

"They weren't on the stage. Guess they're coming by car," Field answered. "Come on over here, Hank."

Hank gave the young woman a swift, comprehensive glance, then swept off the sweat-stained sombrero to disclose dark curly hair, carelessly tumbled about his head. Field performed introductions and explained the reason for them.

"Well, now," Hank said, "it's all right with me, but you'd better sort of get acquainted with those other people this afternoon, see how you like them, and then sound them out. It's sort of embarrassing if you get out with people you don't like. You can get cabin fever awful easy."

"Cabin fever?" she asked, her voice and eyes showing amusement as she took in Hank's picturesque sincerity.

"That's right. We call it cabin fever hereabouts. Two people get snowed in a cabin all winter. Nothing to do but look at each other. Pretty quick they get completely fed up, then little things begin to irritate them, and first thing you know they're feuding. Outsiders get the same feeling sometimes when they're out on a camping trip with people they don't like."

"Oh, I'm quite sure I'd get along with these other people."

"Well, they'd ought to get along with you," Hank said, with open admiration. "What you going in for? Fishing? Or hunting? Or—?"

She gave him the same smile she had given Field when he had interrogated her about her residence. "I'm an amateur photographer. I want pictures of the Middle Fork country, and I'm particularly anxious to get pictures of people—people who have lived in that country for a long time. The old residents, you know. Types. Character studies."

"Well, I guess that could be arranged," Hank said, somewhat dubiously. "The country and the cabins are all right. The people, you'd have to approach tactfully."

She smiled. "You'd be surprised to find how tactful I am."

Hank grinned. "Well, those people are due in this afternoon. You can sort of size them up."

"What," she asked, "are *they* going in for? Hunting? Or fishing?"

Hank said, "Well, now, up in this country people just don't ask questions like that off-hand."

"You asked me."

Hank shifted his weight from one foot to the other. His eyes were pools of amusement.

"Well, now, ma'am, you've just got to make allowances for me. I'm different."

"I'm quite good at making allowances for people," she said. "I've had lots of experience."

"That'll come in handy," Hank told her.

"And since you're the one who asks the questions," she went on, "suppose you find out from the other people whether it's all right for me to join the party."

"After you've had a chance to look 'em over and see if it's okay by you," Hank said.

"I am *quite* sure it will be all right as far as I'm concerned."

"You got a sleeping bag, ma'am?"

"Down at the express office—that is, it should be. I sent in most of my stuff by express a few days ago."

"I'll look it up," Ray Field said, and then asked casually, "Sent from Crystal City?"

She met his eyes. "No," she said. "Merely inquire for a package sent to Marion Chandler, care of the express office, if you will, please."

Sometime early the next afternoon Marion Chandler looked back on the long line of horses from her position near the head of the string. The packs, covered with white

tarpaulins and swaying slightly from side to side with the motion of the horses, made the pack string look like a huge centipede, each white pack a joint in the body.

The trail itself was hardly two feet wide in most places, a narrow ribbon cut out of the wall of the canyon. Below, a stream tumbled pell-mell over rocks and sunken logs, hurling itself around bends, lashing itself into spumes of white foam in its brawling haste.

High up above towered the walls of the canyon, granite pinnacles, in places seeming to overhang the trail. Farther back were more gradual slopes, splashed here and there with dark patches of pine, until, finally, far, far up were the serrated ridges of the highest peaks.

The trail wound interminably. Starting from a ranch located in a mountain "cove," it had followed a stream through timbered meadows where the cold lay in a still, hushed blanket of frosty white. Now the sun was high, and the trail had dropped sharply down the canyon. At these lower elevations the sun poured heat into the narrow defile.

Hank Lucas led the procession. Behind him was Corliss Adrian, whom Marion judged to be about twenty-seven. She had

chestnut hair, brown eyes, and was wrapped in an aura of subdued tragedy. It was a pose which well suited her, a pose which Marion felt would make men refer to her as "brave."

Marion, watching her ride, knew that she was a tenderfoot. Her back was too stiff. She insisted on having her stirrups too short, the effect being to throw her weight far back in the saddle. Twice lately she had asked casually of Hank Lucas, "I wonder how far we've gone since we started." And Marion knew from the vague but cheerful manner in which Lucas answered the question that this was a routine with him, the first indication that a "dude" was becoming fatigued. But Corliss was being brave and uncomplaining, riding in silence.

Back of Marion Chandler, James A. Dewitt, a thick, jolly individual in the middle thirties, frankly hung to the horn of the Western saddle when he came to the bad places in the trail. Behind him rode Sam Eaton, who was doing the cooking for the party, a quiet, middle-aged man who said nothing except when absolutely necessary.

Back of him the pack horses came swaying along, and bringing up the rear was Howard Kenney, the assistant wrangler, a young man who had recently been discharged from

the Army and whose eyes contained a touch of sadness. Marion had noticed that when he became jovial he seemed to make a conscious attempt at wrenching his mind away from past memories, an attempt which would almost invariably be followed by a period of detachment during which his tired gray eyes would focus on the distance.

Now he was riding along, accepting the cloud of dust kicked up by the pack train as part of the day's work, from time to time swinging over in the saddle to scoop up a rock of convenient throwing size from the side of the mountain. Then he would stand in his stirrups and chuck the rock with unerring accuracy to prod along whatever pack horse at the moment seemed to be inclined to hold back.

Hank Lucas, at the head of the procession, rode with long stirrups and a loose back. His sweat-stained sombrero was far back on his head, and he kept up a steady succession of cowboy songs. At times he would raise his voice so that those behind him could hear the rollicking words of a fast-moving verse or two, then suddenly he would invoke a veil of self-imposed censorship which left the words mere garbled sounds.

At midafternoon the long string of horses wound its way down the canyon and debouched on the Middle Fork of the Salmon River.

The trail followed the river for a couple of miles, then wound around a rocky point where the way had been blasted out of sheer granite, and here the trail was barely wide enough to give a horse footing. On the left there was a drop of some two hundred feet, and so narrow was the way that the overhang of the saddle and the bulge of the horse's side completely obscured the edge of the trail. Sitting erect in the saddle and looking down, one saw only two hundred feet of empty space under the left stirrup, with glinting water far below.

Dewitt, grabbing his saddle horn and staring with fear-widened eyes at the trail, still managed to preserve a semblance of his joviality. "I say up there, Hank," he yelled.

Hank swung loosely in the saddle, looking back inquiringly over his left shoulder, pivoting in such a way that he didn't disturb his balance in the least. His face showed only courteous and casual interest.

"What would you do if you met another pack coming from the opposite direction in a place like this?" Dewitt asked.

"Well," Hank drawled, after an interval, "you couldn't turn around, and you couldn't pass. Reckon the only thing to do would be to decide which outfit was the least valuable and shoot it."

"Please don't joke about it," Corliss Adrian said in a low, throaty voice.

Hank's grin was infectious. "Ma'am," he said. "I'm not joking. That was my answer. S'pose you try and figure out some other way."

He included them in a lazy grin, said, "Only about ten minutes to camp," and swung back around in the saddle. Almost immediately his voice rose in a plaintive melody...

His ten minutes turned out to be exactly twenty-three minutes, as Marion Chandler noted from her wrist watch. Then they made camp in a grassy meadow, with pines furnishing a welcome shade. The packs came off in record time. The cook had a fire going, and even before the wranglers had finished hobbling the horses and putting a cowbell on the leader, Marion could smell the aroma of cooking.

James Dewitt came over to stand by her. "You seem to have stood the trip quite well."

"It wasn't bad."

"You do quite a bit of riding."

"What makes you think that?"

"I don't know—the way you were sitting on the horse. You seemed to be a part of him. You aren't tired?"

"Not particularly."

"I'm all in," he confessed. "Too much weight to pack around. I'm going to get busy and take off twenty or twenty-five pounds. Been threatening to do it for a year. Perhaps this will be a good chance to start."

Marion nodded toward the campfire. "Wait until that gets down to coals and you begin to smell the broiling steaks."

"Steaks?"

"That's what Sammy told me. Steaks the first night out."

Dewitt made an exaggerated motion of wiping the back of his hand across his lips. "Guess I'll start my diet tomorrow. So you're taking pictures?"

"That's right."

"Have a contract with some magazine?"

"No, I'm free-lancing."

"Rather an expensive trip just for free-lancing, isn't it?"

"I don't think so," she said coolly.

"Pardon me," he grinned. "I'm always sticking my neck out, saying things that happen to crop into my mind. Did you get any pictures along the trail?"

"No, I'm going to wait a day or two before I do much photography. It's always better to play it that way. The scenery's better, and the first day's journey is usually the longest and the hardest on the stock and the people. Packers don't like to have you hold up the string the first day out."

"You sound like a veteran."

She laughed gaily and said, "I've been listening to Hank."

"But you have been on quite a few camping trips?"

"Oh, yes."

It was plain that Dewitt wanted to ask more questions, but her manner held his curiosity in check.

Corliss Adrian came over to join them. "Wasn't it perfectly delightful?" she asked, but her voice was flat with fatigue.

Hank Lucas, having finished hobbling the horses, pulled a can of fruit juice from one of the kyacks, jabbed a hunting knife through the top of the can, produced paper cups and a bottle. He mixed the ingredients with haste.

"Now, this here," he announced, "is a little mountain tonic. A couple of these has the effect of loosening the sore muscles, removing kinks from the back, and whetting the appetite. How about it, Mr. Dewitt? Want me to get out your fishing tackle so you can

catch a few trout before supper?"

Dewitt grabbed the cocktail. "Gosh, no," he said. "All I want is to sprawl out and rest. Where are the sleeping bags?"

Lucas passed the drinks around, tossed off one himself, said, "Coming right up." And he promptly proceeded to busy himself getting things unpacked.

Marion was grateful for the fatigue that permeated the camp, which she knew had interposed a shield between her and what had apparently been a well-planned course of questioning agreed on in advance. Dewitt had done his part, but Corliss had been too tired to do hers.

As the sun declined in the west, the shadows of the mountains on the other side of the stream marched rapidly toward them. Almost instantly it became cool and by the time the broiled steaks, potatoes, and salad were on their plates, the sharp tang of the mountain air, plus the effect of the cocktails, had whetted their appetites so that eating was a full-time occupation. And in an incredibly short time after eating the food induced a drowsy torpor which made even the most fragmentary conversation an effort.

The fire crackled cheerfully

for a while, then died down, and the circle of darkness which had been waiting just outside the camp moved silently in.

"I'm going to roll in," Marion announced. "Good night, everyone."

James Dewitt sighed, and said, "Good night." He rose and started for his sleeping bag. His first two steps were staggering, off-balance attempts to keep himself erect as his cramped muscles for the moment refused to work.

A moment later Corliss Adrian had rolled in, and Marion, hurriedly disrobing, slid down into her sleeping bag. She looked over at the campfire, where Hank Lucas, Sam Eaton, and Howard Kenney were gathered in a little group silhouetted against the glowing embers.

She wondered sleepily at the subject of their conference and determined that she would lie awake to watch them, suddenly suspicious of the intense attitude of concentration.

She doubled the light pillow of her sleeping bag to prop her head up so she could see them more clearly, closed her eyes momentarily when they began to smart, to shut out the light of the campfire. Her consciousness was almost instantly sucked down into an abyss of warm comfort....

When she wakened there was the feel of dawn in the air. The stars over the tops of the big pines had receded into a sky which was taking on just a faint suggestion of greenish-blue color.

She knew that it was cold outside because she could feel a tingling at the tip of her nose, but the envelope of the sleeping bag was filled with warm down and she was too comfortable to even move. She lay there in a state halfway between sleeping and waking, listening to the sounds of the purling river and the stir of activity around camp. Time ceased to exist.

There was color in the pine trees now. The stars had disappeared and the sky had taken on a distinctly bluish tint. She heard the sound of distant shouts, and then the clanging of the bell on the lead horse became suddenly a hysterical clamor.

Hoofs pounded and, startled, she raised herself on an elbow, to see the horses coming into camp, driven along by Howard Kenney, who was riding bare-back, letting out cowboy yells at intervals. Sleep was effectively banished.

Marion struggled into her clothes, splashed ice-cold water on her face, and felt that surge of vitality which comes with the dawn when one has been

sleeping on the ground in the open.

With an appetite sharpened by the fresh air, she watched the cook bring flapjacks to a golden brown and put them on her plate together with slices of crisp, meaty bacon. A thick slab of country butter melted to run down the sides of the hot cakes and mingle with the maple syrup. There was clear, strong coffee in a huge agateware cup.

She ate with zest, and then walked down to the edge of the river, where Dewitt was just finishing putting his trout rod together. He had made a few preliminary casts to soften up his leader, and now, with a skilled wrist motion, sent a fly winging out in a long cast.

"Hello," he said, grinning amiably. "You're looking mighty fit this morning." Using his left hand to pull the line through the guides, he brought the fly around the edge of a little ripple, then across a straight stretch of swift current.

"Feeling like a million dollars," she said.

A trout suddenly flashed up out of the water, struck at the fly, missed, and then went sulking down to the depths of the stream.

"Missed him," Dewitt said. "I was a little too anxious. Whipped the fly right out of his mouth."

Hank Lucas, who had joined them without being observed, said, in his peculiar drawling voice, "No need to get discouraged. There's lots of 'em in here. If you want to fish an hour or so while we're getting the packs on, you'll have more fish than you can carry ...

Haven't seen Mrs. Adrian, have you?"

Dewitt snapped in the line, made another cast. "No. Is she up?" he asked, his eyes glued to the fly.

"She's up, all right. Took a little walk upstream. She hasn't come back for breakfast."

Dewitt said abruptly, "Huh? You say she's gone?"

"That's right. Seems to have taken a walk," Lucas said, "but there aren't any tracks on the trail. I thought I'd take a look along the stream here, and then I saw you fishing."

Lucas strolled more or less aimlessly up the stream edge between the rocks, then said suddenly, "Here's where she went."

Marion had to look twice to see the track. Then it appeared to be only a faint discoloration of the ground. But, some twenty yards farther on, Lucas, who had kept moving on ahead, uncovered another fresh track—this time made in damp sand and distinctly visible.

Dewitt abruptly lost interest

in the fishing and snapped in his line. "Guess I'd better follow her."

"Keep on fishing if you want," Hank said. "I'll go on up . . . Maybe you'd like to take a walk," he said to Marion, and then added, with a grin, "In case she's taking a swim, you can go on ahead and tell her she'll have to hurry if she wants breakfast. We've got to get the packs on."

Dewitt hesitated. "Really, I should come," he said.

"Why?" Hank asked, and then added, "I can probably follow her trail as well as you can."

Dewitt grinned. "Oh, well, if you put it that way," he said.

He resumed his fishing, and Hank and Marion moved slowly upstream.

Almost instantly the lazy smile left Hank's eyes. His manner became tense and businesslike. "Any idea where she might have gone?" he asked.

"No. I woke up shortly before dawn and then dozed again. I didn't hear her move."

"She was in her sleeping bag when Kenney and I took out after the horses. You haven't any idea what she might be after?"

"She might have wanted to bathe."

"Water's pretty cold," Hank

said, and then added abruptly, "You know what she's in here for?"

"She wants to find her husband?" Marion ventured.

"That's right . . . You're a photographer?"

"Yes."

Hank said, "Here's a copy of a picture. It ain't too clear because it isn't a print—it's a picture of a picture. What do you make of it?" He handed her one of the post-card reproductions Tom Morton had made.

"What," Marion asked, studying the photograph, "do you want to know about it?"

"Anything you can tell about the picture. Just from looking at it."

"Lots of things," Marion said.

"What, for instance?"

"To begin with," she said, "the picture was probably taken with a 3-A folding Kodak with a rapid rectilinear lens. It was taken in the middle of the day."

"How do you figure that?"

"Well," she said, "despite the fact that the lens was stopped 'way down, there's still a certain blurring at the extreme corners and there's a peculiar diffused warmth to the shadows. You get that with a rapid rectilinear lens. The anastigmatic lens has a tenden-

cy to cut things wire-sharp. But there isn't quite the warmth in the shadows and—"

"Wait a minute. What do you mean the lens was stopped 'way down?" Hank asked.

She said, "When the diaphragm shutter of a lens is wide open, the speed is increased but there's very little depth to the field. In other words, if you take a fairly long focal-length lens such as is necessary to cover a post-card-size film, and set it, say, at twenty-five feet and leave it wide open, things beyond thirty feet or so will be out of focus, and things closer than twenty feet will also be out of focus. I've forgotten the exact table, but that will serve as an illustration. On the other hand, if the lens is stopped 'way down, virtually everything will be in focus. The stopping down gives a depth of field. Objects only eight or ten feet away will be fairly sharp, and so will things in the distance."

"And this lens was stopped down?"

"Yes," Marion said. "Moreover, see the little white fog down there in the corner? Well, that's a light leak, and probably came from a little hole in the bellows of the camera. If it had been careless winding on the spool, you'd have seen a little different type of leak and . . . Here's Mrs. Adrian now."

Corliss Adrian, trim and fresh, stepped out from behind a rock. Apparently she was engaged in watching the other side of the stream very intently. But she seemed to watch it a little too long, and her surprise on finally seeing Hank and Marion seemed a little too pronounced.

Marion started to say, "I think she's been watching us," but then abruptly changed her mind and remained silent.

Hank said good-naturedly, but still with a certain rebuke in his voice, "This here is a searching party out to locate the lost tenderfoot."

"Don't ever worry about me," Corliss Adrian said, with a quick, nervous laugh. "I decided to get up and see if I couldn't see a deer."

"See anything?"

"I saw some does and fawns and one young buck."

"Breakfast is just about over," Hank said. "We're trying to get things cleaned up so we can get away."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I'll rush right on back. Hank—"

"Yes?"

"Do you see that canyon up there, the one with the peculiarly shaped rock up near the top of the ridge?"

"Uh-huh."

"What place is that?"

"Broken Leg Canyon."

"I wonder if we could go up there. It looks like marvelous country."

"That's just about where I'm aiming to go," Hank said.

"Oh, that's wonderful."

"You see," Hank explained, "when Bill showed me the picture of that cabin, there wasn't anything on it that gave a definite clue to where it was but somehow, from the way the ground looked, I had a hunch the thing might be up Broken Leg Canyon. I thought we'd take a look up there. Provided it's okay with Miss Chandler, here."

"Oh, I think that would be wonderful," Marion said eagerly. "That rock would really make a magnificent photograph."

"Then that's all settled," Corliss said.

Marion wondered if Hank Lucas had detected a certain note of smug satisfaction in Corliss's voice. She glanced at him from the corner of her eyes, but he seemed thoroughly engrossed in picking his way over stream-worn boulders.

Dewitt was landing a fish as they walked past, and was too engrossed in what he was doing to even see them. The cook was plainly angry, and Howard Kenney, faced with the job of getting the pack saddles on the horses, was indignantly silent.

Corliss Adrian moved over to a place by the fire, apparently heedless of the taciturn disapproval of the cook. Lucas started getting pack saddles on the horses, and Marion moved over to the two men. "Is there anything I can do?" she asked Kenney.

"Not a thing," Kenney said, smiling. "You might get your personal things all together and the air out of your mattress. No use trying to break any records getting a start, though. The Queen of Sheba is going to take her time."

Marion glanced over to where Corliss Adrian was settling herself in a folding chair at the camp table, with every evidence of preparing to enjoy a leisurely breakfast.

"Not much we can do until we get the kitchen ready to load," Kenney explained. "Perhaps I'd better help you get the air out of your mattress." He walked over to the beds, unloosened the valves, and slowly rolled up the sleeping bags, letting the air escape.

"You like this life, don't you?" Marion asked.

"Love it."

"But it's hard work, isn't it?"

"Oh, off and on. But it's nice work. It's the only way I can afford to hang around the country as much as I'd like to.

Sort of vacation."

"I see."

"Sleep all right last night?" he asked.

"Fine."

"You would. You were taking the ride all right yesterday. You're used to Western saddle trail riding."

She became conscious of the curious interrogation in his eyes, and knew suddenly that this was no casual questioning, but a well-planned examination which probably linked in with the three-way conference at the campfire last night.

"Yes, I've done some mountain riding," she said, and calmly turned away and began packing her personal belongings.

Thereafter Marion avoided Howard Kenney . . .

When camp had been broken and all but the last two horses loaded, Hank Lucas approached his dudes.

"Kenney can finish throwing the packs, with the help of the cook, and bring the string along," Lucas said. "I want to move on ahead and pick out a good campsite. If you folks would like to come along with me, you can save a little time."

"That'll be fine," Marion said.

"Wait a minute," Dewitt interposed cautiously. "How do

you propose to save this extra time? As I see it, the pack train will be ready to start in ten or fifteen minutes."

"There's quite a bit of smooth trail ahead," Hank said. "We can put the horses in a trot."

"In a trot!" Corliss Adrian exclaimed in dismay.

Hank grinned. "Don't appeal to you, eh?"

"If it makes any difference to the others I'll be only too glad to go along," Corliss said with dignity, "but if it doesn't I think I'd prefer to walk my horse. However, you're in charge, and I'll do as you say."

Dewitt stepped into the situation. "You two go right ahead," he said. "Take all the time you want. We'll come along with the pack string. After all, we've got all day. Our time isn't *that* valuable."

Lucas glanced at Marion.

She nodded.

"Okay, let's go," Lucas said. He took his chaps off the horn of the saddle, buckled them around his waist, fastened the snaps under his legs, put on his spurs, and swung into the saddle.

They started out at a brisk trot. There was a wide valley to skirt where another stream came into the Middle Fork. It took a detour of nearly three miles to bring them back

opposite the mouth of the canyon on the other side of the stream. The horses splashed through a ford, followed relatively level going for three-quarters of a mile, and then started an abrupt climb.

Marion regarded the sweating horses during one of the brief rest periods which enabled the animals to catch a few quick breaths.

"Aren't you pushing the horses a bit fast?" she asked.

Hank tilted back his sweat-stained sombrero. "To tell you the truth, I wasn't anxious to have those other two along. I don't want to disappoint them, in case I don't find what I'm looking for."

"What are you looking for?"

"The cabin shown in that photograph."

"You think you know where it is?"

"Well, now," Hank said, shifting sideways in the saddle and cocking his right knee over the horn of the saddle, "I can best answer that by saying that I know the places where it ain't."

She laughed.

"You see," Hank went on seriously, "that cabin is up on a ridge somewhere. I know just about when it must have been built. That is, I know it was built *after* the last real heavy winter—on account of the down

timber. I know the general nature of the country it's in. And, well, I've been doing a little listening around.

"A year ago a chap who *could* be this man they're looking for showed up here and had a partner with him. They went up in this country somewhere and sort of disappeared. Everyone thinks they went out the other way through the White Cliff country. Had one pack horse between them. I talked with the chap who sold 'em the horse. One of the fellows was a pretty good outdoor man; the other was a rank tenderfoot. Now, maybe there's a cabin up in here somewhere that was built and then abandoned."

"Do you know where it is?"

Hank shook his head.

Marion surveyed the tumbled waste of wild, rugged country. "How in the world do you ever expect to find it in this wilderness if you don't know where it is?"

"Same way the people who lived in it found it," Hank said. "Take along in the winter when trails were pretty well snowed over, they had to have something to guide them when they wanted to go home."

"How do you mean?"

Hank motioned toward the trees along the trail. "See those marks?"

"Oh, you mean the blazes?"

"That's right. Now, you see, along this trail you've got a long blaze and underneath it two short ones. They're pretty well grown over and a person that didn't know what he was looking for wouldn't find them. But they show up plain enough to a woodsman."

"And you think these men blazed a trail in to their cabin?"

"Must have."

"How much farther?"

Hank grinned. "I'm darned if I know. I'm just looking for blazes."

He swung around in the saddle, dropped his right foot back in the stirrup. "Okay," he said, "let's go."

From little natural meadows which existed here and there along the trail, Marion could see out over an awe-inspiring expanse of country—mile on mile of tumbled mountain peaks, deep, shadow-filled canyons, high, jagged, snow-covered crests.

Hank Lucas looked back at her and grinned. "Lots of it, ain't there?"

"I'll say there is."

Abruptly he reined in his horse.

"What is it?"

"There's an elk," he said.

"Where? I don't see him."

"Over there. Wait a minute;

he's going to bugle to the horses."

From the shadows came a clear, flutelike whistle which started on a low note, ran to a higher note, then dropped through two lower notes into final silence.

"Oh, how beautiful!" Marion exclaimed.

"First time you ever heard an elk bugle?"

Her eyes were glistening. She nodded her head.

"He doesn't like the horses," Lucas said. "Thinks they're a couple of bull elks which may be rivals. This country is pretty wild. He don't know much about men. There he is over there in the shadows under that tree."

She caught sight of him then, a huge, antlered animal standing in the shadows. Abruptly he pawed the ground, lowered his head, gave a series of short, sharp, barking challenges.

"He looks as though he's getting ready to attack," Marion said, alarmed.

"He is," Hank grinned. "But he'll get our scent before he does any damage, find out we ain't other elks, and beat it." He turned to her sharply. "I don't notice you trying to photograph him. I haven't seen you photograph anything so far. If you didn't come in here

to take pictures why *did* you come in here?"

She said, "If I told you, would you keep it to yourself?"

"I might."

Marion's speech was quick and nervous. "I came in here to find my brother. I think he's the one who was with Frank Adrian. That's why I was willing to go along with these other two."

Hank spun his horse so he was facing her. "Okay," he said quietly; "suppose you tell me about him."

"I don't know too much about it," she said. "The last letter I had from Harry was last summer. He was at Twin Falls then. There was an ad in the paper stating that a man who was going into the hills for his health wanted a partner who was fully familiar with camping, trapping, and mining. This man was willing to give a guarantee, in addition to a half interest in any mines or pelts. It sounded good. Harry wrote me he'd answered the ad and got the job, that he liked his partner a lot, and they were going to head into the Middle Fork country. That's the last I heard from him."

"He write you often?"

"Only once every two or three months," she said. "But he's close to me. He's my older brother."

"He give you any address?" Hank asked.

"Yes, the county seat back there."

"You write to him there?"

"Yes."

"What happened?"

"The letters came back. I don't think Harry would have gone away and—well, he wouldn't have gone this long without writing unless something had happened. I've been wondering whether that ad was on the up and up."

"I see," Hank said. "Your brother's name Harry Chandler?"

"Harry Benton," she said. "My name is Marion Chandler Benton. I didn't want to use the last name until I knew more about things. I thought perhaps if Harry had got in any trouble I might be able to help him. He's impulsive and a little wild."

Hank regarded her shrewdly. "Ever been in trouble before?"

"Yes. You see, he's—well, he's impulsive."

"And what's the reason you didn't tell Corliss Adrian about this?"

"Because if he's got into trouble," Marion said, "I can do more for him if people don't know who I am. I'm telling you because you know that I'm in here for something other than photographs, and I want you to

know what it is so—well, so you'll know."

"So I'll quit trying to find out?" Hank asked, with a grin.

"Something like that."

"This brother of yours is sort of the black sheep of the family?"

"Yes."

"But he's your favorite, just the same?"

"Yes."

"Want to tell me about the other time he was in trouble?"

"No."

Hank gently touched the top of his spur to his horse. "Okay, let's go."

They rode on for another half mile, passing now through big-game country. Twice they saw deer standing watching them. Once they heard crashes in the forest as a big bull elk stampeded his cows out of their way, then turned, himself, to bugle a challenge.

"Usually the deer don't hang around so much in the elk country," Hank said, "but there seem to be a lot of them in here I— What's this?" He stopped abruptly.

"I don't see anything."

Hank pointed to a tree.

"Oh, yes; I see it now. It's a blaze—a different blaze from this trail blaze. Looks as though the person who made it didn't want it to be too prominent."

Hank indicated other trees

bearing all but imperceptible scars. "Want to take a look?" he asked.

She nodded.

Hank turned his horse down the ridge, following the faint trail.

"Shouldn't you leave a note or something, in case the pack string catches up with us?"

"They'll see our tracks," Hank said.

They skirted wide patches of down timber, lost the trail twice on such detours but eventually picked it up again. Then, without warning, they came to a little clearing and a cabin.

Hank swung down off his horse and dropped the reins to the ground.

Marion looked at the cabin for a moment, then flung herself out of the saddle. "It's the same cabin that's in the picture," she said. "The picture was taken from over there."

They crossed the little opening and Hank pushed the cabin door open.

Marion stood at his side, looking over the one-room structure.

There was a wood stove of rough iron, two bunks, a table, a rude bench, a row of boxes which had been nailed to the wall so as to form a cupboard and in which were a few dishes, knives, and forks. A frying pan

hung from a nail, and there was a large stewpan face down on the stove.

The cabin had a dirt floor, but it was cleaner than any abandoned cabin Marion had ever seen. Yet it held that characteristic musty smell which indicated it had been some time since there had been a fire in the stove or since men had slept on the two bunks.

On the table was a kerosene lamp partially filled with kerosene.

"Well," Hank said, "I guess this is it. You say your brother's an old-time camper?"

"That's right. He's done quite a good deal of trapping and prospecting. He didn't like too much civilization."

Hank nodded. He took off his hat and scratched the hair around his temples.

"What is it?" she asked. "Anything?"

"No," Hank said, "I guess it's okay. Let's get back to the trail. We'll want to camp right around here somewhere."

"We could camp in the flat here and use the cabin, couldn't we?"

"Better not," Hank said shortly. "Let's go back to the trail and— Hello, what's this?"

Hank was looking at the three boxes which had been nailed to the side of the cabin.

"What is it?"

Hank said, "That piece of paper. Looks like the edge of an envelope."

"Oh, yes, I see it now."

Hank moved over. His thumb and forefinger gripped the corner of an envelope which had been pushed into a small space between the boxes and the log wall of the cabin.

Marion laughed nervously. "It must be a letter he put there and forgot to mail."

Hank turned the envelope over, said, "It's addressed, 'To Whoever Finds This Letter.' The envelope isn't sealed. Let's just take a look."

Hank pulled back the flap of the envelope and took out the single sheet of paper, which was covered on both sides with fine pen-and-ink writing. He spread it out on the table.

Marion, standing at his shoulder, read the letter with him.

"My name is Frank Adrian, although until the last few days there was a great deal I couldn't remember about myself. I am married to Corliss Latham Adrian, and I will put her address at the bottom of this letter, so the finder may notify her in the event it becomes necessary.

"I have been subject to attacks of amnesia. Some time ago I had an attack which sent

me wandering away from home. For a while I didn't know who I was, then I could remember only a part of my life. There was a hiatus following an automobile accident in which I received a blow on the head. However, recently my mind has cleared, and I know now who I am.

"For some time I have been engaged in a partnership with a chap named Harry Benton, a man who is an experienced woodsman, packer, and prospector. We came up here to this cabin to do some prospecting until the weather got cold and then do some trapping.

"I have heard something about cabin fever, that peculiar malady which grips two persons who are forced into constant association with each other, until finally they become so thoroughly annoyed and irritated that a species of insanity is generated.

"I had never thought that could happen to me.

"I am all right, but my partner, Harry Benton, has developed a bad case of cabin fever. He hates me with an insane, bitter hatred. I think the man is crazy.

"A few days ago we had a quarrel over a matter so trivial it seemed absurd to me, but I can see that Benton has become absolutely furious and is brood-

ing over it. I am going to try and leave here, but I am still pretty much of a tenderfoot and it will be a hard trip for me. I feel certain that if Benton finds I have run out on him he will track me down and kill me. Therefore I want to get enough of a head start so he can't catch up with me.

"If the worst should come to the worst and anything should happen, will the finder of this letter please notify my wife."

The letter was signed, "FRANK ADRIAN," and below that was the address of his wife.

Hank looked up at Marion Benton.

"Why, how absolutely absurd!" she exclaimed. "The man must be insane. Harry never was a bit like that."

"Cabin fever is a peculiar thing," Hank said. "I've seen people that were just as nice as could be. They'd be swell campmates until they got cabin fever and—well, it is a kind of insanity. You can't—"

"Oh, bosh and nonsense! Harry has camped with people all over the country. He's been out in the hills as much as you have. It's absolutely absurd to think of Harry flying off the handle that way."

"Of course, a tenderfoot is something of a trial to live with," Hank pointed out.

"There are times when just wrangling them gets you to the point where—"

"But, Hank, that's absolutely foolish. I don't know why this man wrote that letter, but it's absurd."

"Well," Hank said, "let's go on back and stop the pack train. We'll camp around here somewhere and then take a closer look at the cabin. Everything seems to be all nice and shipshape."

Marion nodded, too stunned and angry to engage in much conversation.

Hank looked carefully around the place for a while, then said, "Oh-oh, what's this?"

"What?"

Hank turned to one of the walls. Down near the floor were reddish-brown stains which had evidently splattered against the wood in pearshaped drops, then had dried.

Marion looked at the stains, then raised her eyes to Hank. "Hank, is it—"

Hank nodded and said, "I guess we'd better close up the place and go get the others."

It was well along in the afternoon when Marion Chandler Benton, Corliss Adrian, James Dewitt, and Hank Lucas returned to the cabin. In the meantime they had found a

camping place, and left Kenney and the cook to unpack the horses and make camp.

Lucas had briefly described what they had found and had shown the others the letter. Marion had announced to one and all that she was Harry Benton's sister and had ridiculed the letter.

James Dewitt had accepted the announcement of her relationship to Frank Adrian's partner without surprise. He had, however, promptly taken sides with Mrs. Adrian.

"You don't suppose Frank Adrian wrote that letter just for fun, do you?" he said.

"He was a tenderfoot," Marion said. "He wasn't accustomed to living out in the hills with anyone. Harry was probably a little taciturn, and Frank took it for cabin fever."

"Well, if nothing happened to him, and it was all a mistake," Dewitt said, "why hasn't his wife heard from him?"

"Because he has amnesia. He's had another lapse of memory."

"Could be," Dewitt said, in a tone that failed to show any conviction. "Since we're taking off the masks, I may as well tell you I'm a detective in charge of the missing persons department of— Well, here, take a look at my credentials, all of you."

"Please let's get started," Corliss Adrian said. "I don't want to make any trouble for anyone. All I want is to find Frank. Please let's go."

When they arrived at the cabin, Dewitt inspected the reddish-brown stains on the wall and promptly took charge. "Those stains are blood," he said. "Now, let's be careful not to disturb anything in the cabin. Hank, show me exactly where it was you found the letter."

Hank Lucas replaced the letter behind the boxes. "Right here," he said. "It was sticking out just about like this."

"As much as that?"

"That's right. Just about like this."

"I see. Let's look at this stove."

Hank said, "Doesn't seem to be any firewood or kindling here, but I can go out and get some dry wood and in just a few minutes have this whole cabin heated up."

"Definitely not," Dewitt said. "We'll leave everything exactly as it is, except that we'll look through these ashes down below the grate here."

Dewitt found a piece of flat tin from which he made a scoop, and began shoveling the ashes. After the second shovelful he gave an exclamation.

There were four or five

badly charred buttons in the ashes.

"I guess you folks better get out," Dewitt said to Corliss and Marion. "It's beginning to look bad. You girls wait outside. We don't want any evidence obliterated. You'd better wait over there by the door, Hank. This is a case where too many cooks spoil the broth. I know exactly what to do and how to do it."

Corliss and Marion went outside. Corliss was crying, Marion indignant. Hank strolled off down the trail, which he said probably led to a spring.

There followed a period of waiting in an atmosphere of hostility. Marion and Corliss sat on a fallen log, maintaining a distance of some eight feet, both apparently intent on the scenery, both under emotional tension.

Then Hank Lucas came walking back rather hurriedly. He talked briefly to Dewitt. The men took off, carrying with them a shovel which had been standing in the corner of the cabin by the stove.

Corliss apparently failed to appreciate the significance of Hank's errand, but Marion waited, watching with fear-strained eyes as the men walked rapidly down the path toward the spring.

When they returned, twenty minutes later, Marion knew what had happened merely from their attitudes. Dewitt, bustling in his efficiency, was now very definitely in charge. Hank, coming along behind him carrying the shovel, had a dejected droop to his shoulders.

Dewitt said, "Corliss, we want you."

She came to him, and Dewitt engaged in low-voiced conversation, glancing almost surreptitiously at Marion. Marion saw Corliss catch her breath, heard her half scream; then they were gone down the trail. They were back within ten minutes. The cold hostility of Dewitt's eyes confirmed her worst fears.

He said, "It's my duty to inform you, Miss Benton, that we have discovered the body of Frank Adrian. The evidence is unmistakable that he was shot in the back of the head with a high-powered rifle, firing a soft-nosed bullet. In view of other evidence I've found, there can be no question but what your brother was the murderer."

Marion was on her feet. "How dare you say any such thing! You are making a superficial appraisal of circumstantial evidence. My brother may have been living with him, but he wasn't the only man in these mountains. After all,

Adrian was mentally deranged. He—"

"Shot himself in the back of the head with a rifle?" Dewitt asked sarcastically.

"Well, I guess there are other people in these mountains. My brother and Adrian might have found a rich mine and—"

"That," Dewitt said coldly, "is something you can try to prove to a jury *after we've caught your brother.*"

"Or," Marion went on desperately, "that body could be someone else."

"The identification is absolute," Dewitt said. "Not only is there an identification by Corliss despite the state of the body due to the time it's been in a shallow grave, but there are certain means of identification which were given me by Corliss before she ever came in here. There's no question about the identity of the body. And as far as my duty is concerned, it's plain. Your brother is a fugitive from justice. He has a head start—too big a head start. But there seems to be no question as to the trail he took in going out, and I am going to ride over that trail. There's a telephone at the other end of it."

Hank Lucas was downright apologetic when he moved up to talk with Marion after Dewitt had gone over to comfort Corliss. "There's an—"

other way out of this country," he said. "It's only about fifteen miles of trail from here, and gets you to an automobile road. There's a ranch there and a telephone. Dewitt feels he should get in there right away, and I've got to guide him. Corliss is pretty much all in, but she doesn't want to remain here."

"Hank, tell me," Marion said tearfully. "I don't trust this man on the evidence. He's a prejudiced, overbearing, bullying—"

"He's a pretty good detective," Hank Lucas said. "As far as the evidence he's uncovered is concerned, Marion, there are half a dozen clues that tell the whole story."

"And the body's that of Frank Adrian?"

"Doesn't seem to be any question about that... We don't feel that it's right for you to hang around the cabin the way things are. Don't you want to go back to camp and stay there with Kenney and the cook?"

"I don't. I want to get out of this country. I want to get away," Marion said, feeling her voice rise almost to the point of hysteria. "I want to talk with someone who's got some sense. I want to find the Sheriff of this county."

"That's right," Lucas said,

soothingly. "The Sheriff is a square shooter, but there's no use kidding ourselves. So far, the evidence is dead open and shut."

"If they accuse Harry of this I'll get the best lawyer money can buy," Marion stormed indignantly.

"Now, don't go making any mistake on that," Hank said. "That's where you really *could* get in bad. Don't go get any high-priced city lawyer and bring him in here to this county. You take the run-of-the-mill country lawyer up here, and he understands cabin fever. The jury understands cabin fever, and the lawyer understands the jury—"

"We're wasting time," Dewitt interrupted. "We haven't too much daylight left. We'll have to ride fast. Think it will be necessary to take a pack horse with our sleeping bags?"

"Nope," Hank said. "There's a ranger station there and a ranch. We can get them to put us up for the night. But I think probably we can get an auto to drive out from Boise and pick us up."

"Let's get started," Dewitt said.

"This is going to be rough," Hank warned.

Dewitt was grim. "We can take it. This is part of the day's work—my work."

It wasn't until shortly after dark that the four horsemen rounded the last turn of a trail that had seemed absolutely interminable and saw an oblong of light and heard the sound of a radio.

Corliss Adrian was virtually in a state of collapse. Dewitt, holding grimly to the saddle horn, lurched along like a sack of meal. Marion, accustomed as she was to a proper seat in the saddle, was unspeakably weary. Only Hank Lucas seemed at ease and untired.

Once in the ranger station, however, Dewitt's spirits soon revived. He was in his element, putting through telephone calls, requisitioning cars, assuming command. And Marion had to admit reluctantly that as an executive he showed considerable ability.

While they were waiting for the car to arrive from Boise, Ted Meeker, the rancher who lived about half a mile away and who had arrived in a state of excitement after quite frankly having listened over the party phone, fell into conversation with Hank.

"How's the stock coming?" Hank asked.

"Pretty good. There certainly is lots of feed in this meadow during about eight months of the year."

"How are the horses?"

"Fine."

"Got any you want to sell?"

Meeker grinned. "None you'd want to buy."

"Haven't had a stray in here, have you?"

"Say, there is, for a fact," Meeker said. "When the horses came in to hay last winter, there was a black that came in. Big, powerful horse. I haven't seen him before, and I don't know who owns him. There's no brand."

"White left front foot? Star on his forehead?" Hank asked, rolling a cigarette deftly with one hand.

"That's right."

"Back in good shape?" Hank asked casually.

"It is now," Meeker said, and laughed. "Wasn't quite so good when he came in."

"Maybe fifteen years old? Sort of swaybacked?" Lucas asked.

"Don't tell me you own him?"

"Nope. But I know who does."

"Well, by this time the owner's got a feed bill."

Marion listened absently to this conversation, not quite understanding its implications. As the sister of an accused murderer, she found herself in the position of being apart from the little group. She knew, in fact, that Dewitt had

even disliked having her in the room where she could listen to the telephone instructions which had gone out pertaining to the apprehension of Harry Benton. It was a welcome relief, therefore, when she heard the sound of an automobile motor and realized that they would be on the move again.

The drive to the county seat was a long one, and it was nearly noon when the party finally reported to Bill Catlin. They were all exhausted.

The old country Sheriff eyed them curiously. His manner was calm, unhurried, and deliberate. "Looks to me like you've been takin' it pretty hard," he said to Dewitt. "Maybe you'd better roll in for a while before we do anything else."

Dewitt squared his shoulders. "I can't sleep when there are a lot of things to be done. I won't rest until I know every wheel has been set in motion."

"Well, now, we can take over from here," the Sheriff assured him philosophically.

Dewitt shook his head. "I don't want to appear conceited, but it just happens I'm here. I'm going to keep on the job."

Bill Catlin said, somewhat whimsically, "Guess us country boys wouldn't do so well in the city."

Dewitt smiled.

"On the other hand," Catlin said, "we manage to get by out here in our country."

"I hope," Dewitt said, "that the time will come when we have a city-trained man available in every county in the United States."

"Well, now, that just *might* be a good thing," Bill said.

Dewitt's voice was rasping from fatigue. "Well, let's finish up this case if you don't mind."

"You mean finish it up right now?"

"That's right. Arrest one of the guilty parties."

"Who?"

"Use your head," Dewitt said impatiently. "Reconstruct the crime. Put two and two together."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"Hank Lucas tells me he knows that pack horse, has known it for some time. He knows the man who sold it to Adrian."

Catlin nodded.

"That pack horse showed up down by the ranger station after snowfall last year when the horses came in to get fed. He'd been feeding out on the range before then."

Again Catlin nodded.

"Surely you can see what happened," Dewitt went on, trying to restrain his impatience. "There in the cabin we

found some buttons in the stove, meaning that some garments had been burned up. We didn't find a single thing in the line of wearing apparel, blankets, personal possessions, or anything—just a few dishes and odds and ends of that sort. In other words, the cabin had been fixed up very carefully so that any person who happened to stumble onto it wouldn't think there was anything out of the ordinary. It would appear that the trappers who had been in it had taken their furs at the end of the winter season and gone on out to sell them."

"So Hank was telling me," the Sheriff said.

"All right," Dewitt said. "Benton killed Frank Adrian. He loaded all the stuff on the pack horse and walked out to the ranch by the ranger station, where he struck the highway. He unpacked the horse and turned him loose."

"Then what?" Catlin asked.

"Then he vanished."

"Seems like he did, for a fact," the Sheriff said.

"Well," Dewitt nearly exploded. "My God, do I have to rub your nose in it? Figure out what happened. That wasn't any cabin-fever killing. That was willful, premeditated murder. Adrian had quite a roll of cash on him. Benton got out with it. What happened? He got

to that road and unpacked his pack horse. He didn't just evaporate into thin air. Someone met him with an automobile. It had to be someone who was in on the play, someone who could keep an eye on things and wait until people were about ready to launch an investigation, and then contrive to show up and be very solicitous about her 'dear brother.' In other words, it's just as plain as the nose on your face that Marion Benton was her brother's accomplice, and the murder of Frank Adrian was premeditated."

Marion jumped to her feet. "How dare you say anything like that?"

"Now, just a minute, ma'am," Bill Catlin said authoritatively. "If you wouldn't mind just sitting down and keeping quiet, I'll ask you questions when I get around to it. But right now we're having an official investigation, and Mr. Dewitt is doing the talking."

Marion subsided into the chair.

Corliss Adrian said to the Sheriff, "He could have hitchhiked in. I don't think Miss Benton was in on it."

"Don't be silly, Corliss," Dewitt said. "I can appreciate your desire to be charitable. Miss Benton has imposed on all

of us with her superb job of acting, but I'm looking at the thing from the standpoint of a trained investigator."

Marion started to say something, but the Sheriff motioned her to silence.

"Figure it out," Dewitt went on. "That murder was committed sometime before now, sometime before the ground froze. The men had gone in there planning to prospect and then to trap. They had taken in enough supplies to last them through the winter—probably all the supplies they could possibly load on one pack horse. There must have been quite a bit of stuff. Benton had to load all that and pack it out. Then he had to get rid of it.

"I've asked particularly about traffic along that road. Except during hunting season, there's virtually no one who uses it other than the ranger and the chap who has the ranch there, plus the man who delivers the mail.

"I try to do things thoroughly. I've talked on the telephone to the mailman, and I asked him particularly if he remembered picking up anyone with a lot of camp equipment."

"Couldn't he have hidden the camp equipment?" Corliss asked.

"Too dangerous," Dewitt said shortly. "There must have

been a lot of provisions which had to be disposed of some way—bacon, flour, sugar, coffee. Then there were blankets and traps. To simply dump that stuff out somewhere would be taking too big a chance. The minute anyone found that cache of stuff, he'd know something had happened."

Sheriff Catlin nodded approvingly. "You're doing right well," he said.

"I think you'll find," Dewitt told him, with some dignity, "that the basic principles of investigating a crime both in the city and in the country are the same. In the country you have, perhaps, a wider area, which tends to increase the difficulty of finding clues. But, on the other hand, you have a smaller population, which makes the job of finding what you want much more simple."

"Yes, I reckon you're right," the Sheriff said. "You've done some good reasoning there. I guess he couldn't hitchhike. I guess he had to have someone meet him."

"And you can see what *that* means," Dewitt went on. "It means deliberate murder. The crime had to be committed according to a certain schedule. The person with the car had to be there on a certain date. It's your county, Sheriff, and I don't want to dictate, but if it

comes to a showdown, I'm going to have to. I want Miss Benton arrested as one of the two persons who murdered Frank Adrian. I want her arrested now."

The Sheriff turned to Marion Benton. "Miss Benton, if you don't mind, I'd like to ask you a question or two. I know it's sort of embarrassing, but you'll help things along a bit if you'll just talk frankly... Your brother is sort of wild, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Done quite a lot of camping and packing?"

"A lot."

"Lived in the hills a good part of his life?"

"Yes."

"Pretty good prospector?"

"Yes."

"Trapper?"

"Yes."

"Hank tells me you sit a horse pretty good. Take it you've done quite a bit of riding in the mountains, haven't you?"

"Some."

"With your brother?"

"Yes."

"Your brother have anyone along to do the packing or anything when he took those trips?"

"No, of course not. He likes to do it."

The Sheriff turned back to

Dewitt. "Now, then, Hank tells me," he said, "that when you found the cabin there was a shovel on the inside of the cabin by the stove, some blood spots on one of the walls, but no other blood spots anywhere. There were dishes in the little cupboard—dishes that had been washed and put away. There wasn't any firewood or kindling inside the cabin. The stove had ashes that hadn't been cleaned out, and there were some buttons in the ashes. There was this here note that had been stuck behind the boxes that formed the cupboard, and there wasn't a single, solitary thing left in the cabin to show that, of the two men who occupied that cabin, one of them had stayed behind. The pack horse was found at the end of the trail, some skinned-up places on his back."

Dewitt nodded, then said somewhat impatiently, "I've gone all over that before. Hang it, Sheriff, I've given that cabin my *personal* attention. I've *seen* the evidence."

"Well, you've looked at the cabin," the Sheriff said. "Sometimes we don't always see what we look at... Now, let's see. Mrs. Adrian, you registered over here at the hotel and left some baggage, I believe, to be picked up when you came out of the mountains."

"That's right. Hank told me to make the load as light as I could, just take the things I really needed to get along with."

"Hank tells me you ain't done much mountain riding."

"This is my first trip."

"Now, then," the Sheriff said to Dewitt, "I think you've got it right. This here murderer had to have somebody meet him. That means it was a premeditated crime. It means he had an accomplice. It means the thing was worked out according to schedule."

"That's what I've been trying to tell you," Dewitt snapped, "premeditated murder."

"That's right. But a couple of things you've sort of overlooked. Let's do a little thinking out loud. Take that photographic post card for instance."

"What about it?"

"Notice the shadows?"

"The shadows! What have the shadows to do with the murder of Frank Adrian?"

"They're pretty short shadows," Catlin said. "The picture must have been taken right at noon, but even so, shadows don't get that short up here in Idaho except during the summer months. Now, Tom Morton, the photographer who printed that picture, put it on

paper that he says must have been used up by the last part of July. The shadows say it was July. The post card says it was October. How you going to reconcile the shadows and—"

Dewitt laughed. "I'm not even going to try. Frank Adrian didn't disappear until September."

Bill Catlin nodded and went on calmly, "And this here picture was taken with a folding camera that has a little light leak in the bellows. That's how come this little patch of white fog is down here in the corner. Now, I know I'm just sort of boring you, but there's one more thing you'd ought to consider. Remember when that pack horse showed up, his back had been rubbed raw and then healed over?"

Dewitt said, "For heaven's sake, are you crazy? I don't care about the damn' pack horse."

"Well, now," the Sheriff went on, "you'd ought to know the mountains, if you're going to work in 'em. Of course, in packing a lot of dude duffel, even a good man will sometimes get sore backs on one or two of the pack string. You just can't help that. But when you're packing just one horse, and when you're leading him on foot, which is generally a slower proposition than working from

horseback, a man that knew about packing wouldn't get a sore back on his pack horse.

"Now, another thing. The murderer tried to leave the cabin so that anybody that happened to stumble onto it wouldn't think there was anything wrong. Everything would seem to be all nice and shipshape, just the way the trappers would have left it at the close of the winter season.

"But up here in this country we have a custom that's an unwritten law. When a man leaves a cabin, he always leaves dry stovewood and kindling in by the stove. That's so that if he happens to come back in a rainstorm or a blizzard, he's got dry wood to start the fire with. And if somebody else happens to come in looking for shelter, there's always dry wood with which to build a fire.

"Now I don't want to bore you by telling you all these local customs, but this one in particular is pretty rigidly enforced. Now do you get it?"

"Get what?" Dewitt asked.

"There were two men in that cabin. One of them was a tenderfoot, a city dude. The other was a woodsman. One of them killed the other and pulled out. Whoever it was that slicked the cabin up and washed the dishes and made it look as though everything was the way

two trappers had left it certainly wasn't the murdered man; it was the guy who did the killing."

"Naturally," Dewitt said.

"And," Bill Catlin pointed out, "in this case, the man who did that was the tenderfoot."

The idea hit Dewitt suddenly and hard. "But look here," he said. "His wife identified the body. There was a ring on—"

"Sure, sure, she identified the body," Catlin said. "Naturally, the murderer saw to it that the right ring was there to be identified. But *she'd* have made a positive identification in any event. You remember what you said about the crime having to be premeditated and someone having to be at the right place to meet the pack horse on a definite date."

Corliss Adrian pushed her chair back from the table. "Are you," she demanded angrily, "trying to insinuate that I—?"

"Now, just take it easy, ma'am," the Sheriff said. "I'm trying to straighten Dewitt out on the facts of this here case . . . One other thing, Dewitt. Hank tells me this note was sticking out from behind the cupboard. I asked him if a good mountain man would have seen it easy, and he said over the telephone, 'My God, Bill, even a dude would have seen it.' So there you are. You see,

Adrian was just a little too anxious. He wanted to be certain that note would be found.

"Well, now, when Hank telephoned me about this here crime and the things he found, I did some thinking, and then I got hold of the judge and got me a search warrant so I could search the baggage that Mrs. Adrian had left there in the hotel. And, sure enough, there was a 3-A folding camera with a rapid rectilinear lens. And when we took it into Tom Morton's darkroom and put an electric light bulb inside the bellows, you could see that one little pinhole in the bellows just as plain as day . . .

"Now, don't try to make any breaks, Mrs. Adrian. You're all tired out from having a long ride and a long trip. And even if you tried to run away in this country you couldn't get anywhere. It isn't like just ducking outdoors in a city and trying to get lost in a crowd. You've got to stay right here and take your medicine. One thing about it, our menfolks up here are sort of chivalrous to women, and while they won't turn you loose, they may make you sort of an accessory or something that wouldn't quite take the extreme penalty."

"You're crazy," she said. "You've got nothing on me.

This is some bucolic travesty of justice."

"I'm afraid we've got quite a bit on you," the Sheriff said. "You and your husband fixed this up quite a while ago. Both of you prospected around last summer and found that cabin. It had been abandoned, but was pretty new and in good shape. You even took that picture when you found the cabin, a month or two before your husband pulled his disappearing act. You've played it pretty foxy. You'd taken out the insurance policies years ago. It was all as slick as a wet pavement."

"Wait a minute," Dewitt said. "Let me handle this, Corliss . . . Sheriff, your own reasoning defeats itself."

"How come?"

"You admit that the man who left that cabin last tried to fix it up so it would look as though the trappers had moved out for the winter."

"That's what Hank told me," the Sheriff said.

"Yet Hank also told you that this note was left in such a prominent place that anyone, even a dude, couldn't have failed to see it."

The Sheriff chuckled. "Well, now, *that's* an interesting thing," he said. "That's the clue that struck me the minute Hank told me about it over the

telephone. So I did a little thinking."

"I haven't seen any evidence of it yet," Dewitt said, now openly hostile.

"Well," the Sheriff said, "you have to think that one over a little bit. Have to sort of put yourself in the shoes of the murderer, and then you get it."

"I'm afraid," Dewitt said with deep sarcasm "my mental processes are too far inferior to yours to get these fine points. Suppose you explain *it to me*."

"Well, now," the Sheriff said, "just put yourself in the shoes of the murderer. You don't want the body to be discovered until after it's pretty hard to make a positive identification. You've buried the body in a shallow grave. You want it to stay there and decompose for just about so long. Then you're ready to have the thing discovered. Now, then, if it's discovered too soon, you're sunk. Well, you can figure out what that means, Dewitt."

"What does it mean?"

"It means that the murderer, or someone that was in cahoots with him, had to come back to that cabin and put that note there where it would be discovered at just about the right time. The idea was to get someone to go to that cabin, and when he reached the cabin

he *had* to find the note and the body. So the person who put the note there wanted to be sure it'd be found. Now, Adrian could have put it there all right, just the way he says. But if Benton had killed him, he'd have seen that note and naturally burnt it up. A mountain man wouldn't have overlooked that note—not in a million years.

"So when Hank told me about the note and about the way it had been found, I asked him about the color of the ink. Seems like the ink was sort of blue. Now, you take ink that way and, as I understand it, there's some sort of a chemical in it that unites with oxygen and turns black after it oxidizes, and that's what gives you the permanent color in ink. But until that chemical has had a chance to oxidize, they put a blue dye in the ink, so you can see what's been written down. That's why ink will be sort of blue for a while and then, after it gets old, it'll turn black. You take a man that's accustomed to judging colors pretty careful, and he can come pretty close to telling whether pen writing is old or new. Hank said this looked pretty new to him.

"Well, that started me thinking some more, and so I asked Hank over the phone how Mrs. Adrian stood the trip. Did

she ride pretty good in a saddle? And he said she was just like most of the dudes, riding with short stirrups, gripping with her knees, and pushing back against the cantle of the saddle. So I figured she'd hardly be the kind that could make a quick round trip to the cabin to plant a note in there, and maybe slash her finger and leave some bloodstains around. And the way I sized it up, there was only one other person who could have done it.

"Well, I had a pretty good description of Frank Adrian, thanks to the stuff my friend, Ed Harvel, had sent on. So I sort of figured, if he sneaked into that cabin and put a note in there, he'd have had to go in through the ranger station or down through the Middle Fork. But it would have been a pretty hard trip, because *he* was a tenderfoot, too. And it didn't look like they'd take chances having *three* people in on it. However, they're bringing in a few planes lately, and there's a forest service emergency landing field only about five miles from the cabin now.

"So I got busy on the telephone and rang up the cities around that have charter air service, asking them about whether they took a man of a certain description into that landing field within the last

month or so. And, sure enough, I struck pay dirt."

"What did you find?" Dewitt asked, interested now despite himself.

"Well," the Sheriff said, "a man chartering an airplane has to give a lot of information about himself. Of course, this man was using an assumed name. He's working in a garage now. Probably thought he was all good and safe, and nobody was going to bother him. Well, I telephoned down to my friend, the Sheriff there, and we picked him up.

"And when I'd picked him up, I talked with him over the phone and told him about how his wife had already collected the insurance money and run away with a playboy, name of Gridley. That was sort of reading her mind a little in advance. May have been sort of a mean trick, but it worked like a charm. This here Adrian has a quick temper, and seems like he really blew up and started talking fast. He'd evidently heard something about this Gridley chap.

"So now, Mrs. Adrian, I hate to do it, but I've just got to give you lodging in the jail. I've sent over to the hotel and had your bags taken over, and while the matron will be watching you to see what you take out, you can get some clean clothes and—My

gosh!" Bill Catlin said, his voice edged with sympathy. "Darned if she ain't fainted. Hank, will you get a wet towel over there at the washstand, and let's see if we can't snap her out of it? And there's a bottle of whiskey in that locker.

"And I reckon you can use a drink, too, Miss Benton. It's too bad about your brother, but, after all, it's better that way than to have him turn out to be a murderer.

"And as far as Ed Harvel's concerned, Dewitt, I rang him up and told him we'd got the case solved and the murderer in jail.

"And now, if you folks feel like it, we'll get Mrs. Adrian disposed of, and then I guess we can have a little something to eat. I've been up pretty nearly all night working on this thing, and I ain't as young as I used to be. When I go without sleep, I've got to have lots of food to keep the energy up.

"I told Harvel you'd done a fine job of detective work up

here, Dewitt. And Harvel was proud as punch. 'Course I told him that us country fellows had to put a few little finishing touches on, here and there. Just because it's our county, you know, and the voters sort of look to us to keep things in line. But I told him you'd done most of the work.

"Okay, Hank; let's get the matron over here, and then we'll go down and see what we can find. Deer season's open now, and a friend sent me a loin of venison. I took it down to Ted Collins' place and told him to have things all ready to give us a good venison feed when we showed up.

"Oh, yes, another thing: the insurance companies that had the policies on Adrian's life, in favor of his wife, are pretty grateful. Ed Harvel tells me they want to make sort of a contribution.

"So I guess, come to figure it all out, we done a pretty fair day's work. Whatta ya think, boys?"

"Q"

Georges Simenon

Stan the Killer

(translated by Anthony Boucher)

So far as we have been able to check, "Stan the Killer" is the first Inspector Maigret novelet to have been published in the United States. It appeared in the September 1949 issue of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, and was a genuinely important detectival debut.

Do not look for brilliant strokes of deductive reasoning—brilliance of deduction is not Inspector Maigret's long suit. Indeed, no one wants Maigret to be the infallible logician. By all means let him continue to be the slow, heavy, plodding, tormented Maigret, the Maigret of inexhaustible patience, of inextinguishable persistence, of inexpressible understanding of the human heart . . .

Detective: INSPECTOR MAIGRET

MAIGRET PUFFED AT his pipe as he walked along slowly, hands clasped behind his back. It was not a simple matter to push his heavy body through the morning mob in the Rue Saint-Antoine, where a bright sun poured down on carts and baskets of fruits and vegetables, blocking almost the entire width of the sidewalk.

It was marketing time—the time for feeling artichokes and tasting cherries, the time for

scallops and chops to take turns in the scales.

"Fine asparagus, five francs a bundle!"

Clerks in white aprons, butchers in fine checks; the smell of cheese from a dairy shop and farther off a whiff of roasting coffee; the ping of cash registers and the rumble of a bus; the distrustful glances of housewives—all the agitated business of alimentation. . . and in the midst of it the slow heavy progress of Maigret, on

one of his most tormenting cases.

Across from the Rue de Birague there's a little café, with a scant three tables in front of it, called the *Barrel of Burgundy*. There Maigret settled himself, like any other weary passerby. He did not even look up at the tall thin waiter who came for his order. "Small white Mâcon," he muttered—and who was to guess that this occasionally inept new waiter at the *Barrel of Burgundy* was otherwise known as Detective Janvier?

The waiter returned with the wine precariously balanced on a tray. He wiped the table with a questionable cloth, and was even so clumsy as to drop a scrap of paper on the floor. Maigret picked it up as he left, and read:

*The woman's gone out
marketing. No sign of
One-Eye. The Beard left
early. The three others
must be still in the hotel.*

At ten in the morning the crowd was getting even worse. Next to the *Barrel*, a grocery was having a sale and barkers kept entreating the passerby to sample cookies at two francs a box.

At the corner of the Rue de Birague you could see the sign of a dingy hotel, "Rooms by the month, the week or the

day. Payment in advance." With doubtless intentional irony this rat-trap had chosen to call itself the Beauséjour.

Maigret sipped at his light dry white wine and stared apparently aimlessly at the teeming crowd in the spring sun. But his gaze soon settled on a window in the first floor of a house in the Rue de Birague opposite the hotel. At that window a little old man sat by a canary's cage and seemed to have no interest in life but to bask in the sun so long as the Lord should deign to leave him alive.

And this old gentleman, who took no notice of Maigret, was Sergeant Lucas, deftly aged some twenty years.

All this constituted a state of siege which is more vulgarly known to the police as a stake-out. It had lasted six days, and at least twice a day the Inspector came around for the latest news. At night his men were relieved by a patrolman, who was actually a detective from the Judiciary Police, and a wench who contrived to walk the streets without ever picking up a customer.

Maigret would have Lucas's report in a moment, by telephone; it would undoubtedly prove to be no more sensational than Janvier's.

The crowd shoved by so

close to the tiny terrace of the *Barrel of Burgundy* that Maigret found himself constantly obliged to pull his legs back under his chair. And now, as he made one of these shifts, he suddenly realized that a man had sat down unnoticed at the same table. He was a little man, with red hair and sad eyes, whose mournful face had something of the clown about it.

"You again?" the Inspector grunted.

"I beg you to forgive me, Monsieur Maigrette, but I am certain that you will eventually come to understand me and to accept the proposition which I—" He broke off to say to the waitery Janvier, "The same as my friend."

He had an extremely marked Polish accent. He presumably suffered from throat trouble; he constantly chewed at a "cigar" impregnated with creosote, which emphasized the clownishness of his appearance.

"You're getting on my nerves!" Maigret burst out. "Will you kindly tell me how you knew I'd come here this morning?"

"I did not know."

"Then why are you here? Are you going to try to convince me that this is an accidental meeting?"

"No."

The little man's reflexes

were as leisurely as those of the slow-motion acrobats in vaudeville. His yellow eyes gazed around him, staring into emptiness. He spoke in a sad voice, unvarying in pitch, as though perpetually offering condolences.

"You are not nice to me, Monsieur Maigrette."

"That isn't answering my question. How do you happen to be here this morning?"

"I followed you."

"From Headquarters?"

"Long before that. From your home."

"So you admit you're spying on me?"

"I am not spying on you, Monsieur Maigrette. I have far too much respect and admiration for you! I have already stated to you that I shall one day be your collaborator..."

And he sighed nostalgically, contemplating the artificial ash of painted wood which tipped his creosote cigar.

There'd been nothing about it in any of the papers save one; and that one, which had got the tip the Lord knows where, uniquely complicated the Inspector's task.

The police have reason to believe that the Polish bandits, including Stan the Killer, are at this moment in Paris.

It was true enough, but silence would have been more helpful.

In four years a gang of unknown Poles had attacked five farms, always in the North of France, always with the same methods.

In each case it was an isolated farm, run by elderly people. The crime invariably took place the night of a market day; and the chosen victims were always those who had sold a good number of fowls and animals and had a large sum of cash on hand.

Nothing scientific about the procedure. Brutal attacks, as in the days of the highway robbers. Absolute contempt for human life. These Poles were killers. They killed every human being they found on the farm, even down to the children; it was the one way of making sure they could never be identified.

Were there two of them? Or five, or eight?

In every case neighbors had noticed a small truck. One twelve-year-old claimed he had seen a one-eyed man. Some asserted that the bandits wore black masks.

Whatever the facts, one thing was certain: Every inhabitant of each farm had had his throat sliced.

This was no business of the Paris police. This was up to the

mobile units in the provinces, who worked on it for two years without remotely clarifying the mystery—a failure which did not reassure the countryside.

Then a report came in from Lille, where whole villages are Polish enclaves in French territory. The report was vague enough; it was impossible even to establish its ultimate source.

"The Poles say that this is Stan the Killer's gang . . ."

But when the police tried to question the coal miners one by one, the men had never heard of it, or muttered, "Well, they told me . . ."

"Who's 'they'?"

"I don't know. I forget . . ."

Then came the crime near Rheims. There the gang overlooked a servant girl sleeping in the attic, who became the first survivor. She had heard the murderers talking in a language she thought was Polish. She had seen their masks through a hole in the boards; and had noticed that one of the men had only one eye and that another, a giant of a man, was extraordinarily hairy.

And so the police had come to refer to them as "Stan the Killer," "The Beard," and "One-Eye."

For months nothing more turned up, until a detective on the hotel squad made a

discovery. His territory was the Saint-Antoine district, which teems with Poles. And in a hotel in the Rue de Birague he observed a suspicious group which included a one-eyed man and a giant whose face was literally covered with hair.

They were seemingly poor people. The bearded giant and his wife rented a room by the week; but almost every night they gave shelter to several compatriots, sometimes two, sometimes as many as five, and often other Poles rented the adjoining room.

"You want to take this over, Maigret?" the director of the Judiciary Police suggested.

Everything was strictly hush—hush—and so the next day one newspaper printed the story. The day after that Maigret found a letter in his mail—clumsily written in an almost childish hand, full of misspellings, on the cheap sort of paper sold in grocery stores:

*You won't ever get Stan.
Look out. Before you can
take him, he'll have time
to kill off plenty more.*

The letter was no hoax, Maigret was certain; it *felt* right. It had the filthy aftertaste of the underworld.

"Be careful," the chief recommended. "Don't rush into an arrest. The man who's cut sixteen throats in four years

won't hesitate to scatter a few bullets around him when he sees he's done for."

Which was why Janvier had become a waiter and Lucas a basking old man.

The noisy life of the quarter went on with no suspicion that a desperate man might at any moment start firing in all directions...

And then Michael Ozep appeared.

His first meeting with Maigret had been four days ago. He had arrived at Headquarters and insisted on seeing the Inspector personally. Maigret had let him wait a good two hours; but the little man was undaunted. He entered the office, clicked his heels, bowed, and extended his hand:

"Michael Ozep, former officer in the Polish Army, now professor of gymnastics in Paris—"

"Sit down. I'm listening."

The Pole spoke so volubly and with so pronounced an accent that it was sometimes impossible to follow him. He explained that he came of very good family, that he had been forced to leave Poland because of unmentionably intimate misfortunes (he allowed his listener to gather that he had been in love with his Colonel's wife), and that he had now sunk to worse depths of despair than

ever because he could not accustom himself to leading a mediocre life.

"You understand, Monsieur Maigrette..." (it was impossible to wean him from that pronunciation) "...I am a gentleman. Here I am forced to give lessons to individuals of no culture and no education. I am a poor man... I have decided to commit suicide."

"A nut..." Maigret thought to himself. An astonishing number of the unbalanced feel the need of confiding their problems to the police.

"I tried it three weeks ago. I threw myself into the Seine from the Austerlitz Bridge, but the river squad saw me and pulled me out."

Maigret invented a pretext to step into the next office and phone the river squad. The story was true.

"Six days later I tried to kill myself with illuminating gas, but the postman came with a letter and opened the door..."

A phone call to the police station in Ozep's district. And again the story was true.

"I truly *want* to kill myself, do you understand? My existence has lost all value. A gentleman cannot consent to live in poverty and mediocrity. Therefore I thought that you might have need of a man like me..."

"For what?"

"To help you to arrest Stan the Killer."

Maigret frowned. "You know him?"

"No. I have only heard talk about him. As a Pole, I am indignant that a man of my people should so violate the laws of hospitality. I should like to see Stan and his gang arrested. I know that he is resolved to sell his life dearly. Among those who go to arrest him, some will certainly be killed. Is it not better then that it should be I, since I already desire to die? Tell me where Stan is. I shall go and disarm him. If need be, I shall wound him so that he can do no more harm."

All Maigret found himself capable of saying was the traditional, "Leave your address. I'll write you a letter."

Michael Ozep had a furnished room in the Rue des Tournelles, not far from the Rue de Birague. The report of the investigating detective was in his favor. He had indeed been a second lieutenant in the Polish Army when it was organized after Poland gained her independence. Then his trail vanished. In Paris he tried to teach gymnastics to the sons and daughters of small merchants. His suicide attempts were genuine.

Nevertheless Maigret sent him, with the chief's approval, an official letter ending:

... deeply regret that I cannot take advantage of your generous proposition, for which my most sincere thanks.

Twice since then Ozep had appeared at the Quai des Orfèvres and insisted on seeing the Inspector. The second time he had even refused to leave, claiming that he could wait as long as he was obliged to, and thus almost forcibly occupying, hour after hour, one of the green plush arm-chairs in the waiting-room.

And now Ozep sat there, at Maigret's table, in front of the *Barrel of Burgundy*.

"I wish to prove to you, Monsieur Maigrette, that I am of some use and that you can accept my services. It is now three days that I have been following you, and I am in a position to tell you everything that you have done during that time. I know too that the waiter who just brought my wine is one of your detectives and that there is another at the window across from us, near a canary cage."

Maigret clenched the bit of his pipe furiously between his teeth and kept his eyes turned away from the Pole, who kept on in his monotonous voice:

"I understand that when a strange man comes to you and says, 'I am a former officer of the Polish Army and I wish to kill myself'—I understand why you would think, 'This may not be true.' But you have verified everything that I have told you. You have seen that I do not stoop to lies..."

He was a mill grinding out words, rapidly, jerkily. It wore Maigret out merely to listen to him, especially since the accent so distorted each syllable that Maigret had to concentrate to follow the sense.

"You are not a Pole, Monsieur Maigrette. You do not speak the language; you do not comprehend the mentality. I earnestly desire to help you; for I cannot see the good name of my native land tarnished by..."

The Inspector was beginning to choke with anger. The former second lieutenant could hardly fail to observe the fact, but he continued nevertheless:

"If you try to capture Stan, what will he do? He has maybe two, maybe three revolvers in his pockets. He fires at everybody. Who knows how many ladies he wounds? How many little babies he kills? Then people will say that the police—"

"Will you shut up?"

"Now as for me, I am

resolved to die. No one will weep for poor Ozep. You say to me, 'There is Stan!' And I follow him as I have followed you. I wait for the moment when there is no one near us and I say, 'You are Stan the Killer!' Then he fires at me and I shoot him in the leg. By the fact that he shoots me, you have your proof that he is Stan and you are not making a blunder. And since he is crippled by my shot . . ."

There was no stopping him. He would have gone on in spite of the entire universe.

"Supposing I have you arrested?" Maigret broke in crudely.

"Why?"

"To get a little peace!"

"What would you say? What has poor Ozep done in violation of the laws of France which instead he wishes only to defend and for which he is offering up his life?"

"Stuff it!"

"I beg your pardon? Are you agreeing?"

"Not in the least."

At that moment a woman went by, a woman with blonde hair and a clear complexion, recognizably a foreigner. She was carrying a shopping bag and was headed for a butcher shop.

Maigret was following her with his eyes when he noticed that his companion had sudden-

ly set to mopping his brow with an enormous handkerchief which all but swallowed up his small-featured face.

"That is the mistress of Stan, is it not?" Ozep asked.

"Will you leave me the blazes alone?"

"You have convinced yourself that this is the mistress of Stan, but you do not know which one is Stan. You think it is the one with the beard. Now the bearded one is called Boris. And the man with one eye is Sasha. He is not a Pole, but a Russian. If you should investigate them yourself you will learn nothing. In the hotel there are only Poles; they will refuse to answer. Whereas I . . ."

No housewife shopping in the confusion of the Rue Saint-Antoine could suspect the subjects being discussed on the tiny terrace of the *Barrel of Burgundy*. The blonde foreigner was buying chops at a nearby butcher's stall; in her eyes there was something of that same lassitude that lay in the eyes of Michael Ozep.

"Perhaps you are angry with me because you fear that you may be called to account if I am killed? In the first place, I have no family. In the second place, I have written a letter in which I state that I alone, and purely of my own volition, have sought this death . . ."

Poor Janvier stood on the threshold trying to figure out a way of telling Maigret that there was a telephone message for him. Maigret noticed the ambiguous pantomime, but went on watching the Pole and puffing forth little clouds of pipe smoke.

"Listen, Ozep."

"Yes, Monsieur Maigrette?"

"If you're seen again anywhere around the Rue Saint-Antoine, I'll have you arrested!"

"But I live only—"

"You'd better move."

"You are refusing this offer which I—?"

"Get out!"

"But—"

"Get out, or I'll arrest you here and now!"

The little man rose, clicked his heels, bowed almost double, and executed a dignified retreat. Maigret had noticed one of his detectives nearby; now he signaled the man to follow the peculiar professor of gymnastics.

At last Janvier could deliver his message. "Lucas just phoned. He's spotted that they have guns in the room. Five Poles slept in the next room last night, leaving the door open between. Some of them had to sleep on the floor. Who the devil was that character you were talking to?"

"Nothing... How much?"

Janvier slipped back into character, pointing at Ozep's glass. "You're paying Monsieur's check? One franc twenty and one twenty makes two forty."

Maigret took a taxi to Headquarters. At the door of his office he found the detective who had set out after Ozep.

"You lost him?" he roared. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself? I give you the most childish job of shadowing and you—"

"I didn't lose him," the detective murmured humbly.

"Where is he?"

"Here."

"You pulled him in?"

"He pulled me."

For Ozep had, indeed, headed directly for Headquarters, where he had placidly installed himself and his sandwich in the waiting-room, after announcing that he had an appointment with Inspector "Maigrette."

There're no kudos in paper work; but there may be the solution of a case.

Unwillingly, irritatedly, Maigret was adding up in one report in his own large handwriting the various information obtained in two weeks' siege of the Polish gang.

When he set down the facts in order he could see even more easily how very little they had learned. They did not even know precisely how many individuals belonged to the gang. The earlier reports, from the people who had seen or thought they had seen the bandits near the time of the attacks, stated that there were four of them, sometimes five. It was probable that they had other accomplices, who cased the farms and markets beforehand. That brought the number to six or seven, which seemed to correspond roughly with the number who hung around the nucleus in the Rue de Birague.

There were only three regular tenants, all of whom had filled out their cards according to regulations and displayed passports in perfect order:

1. Boris Saft, the one the police called The Beard, who seemed to live as man and wife with the pale blonde.

2. Olga Tzerewski, 28, born in Vilno.

3. Sasha Vorontsov, known as One-Eye.

Boris the Beard and Olga occupied one room, Sasha One-Eye the next; the door between was always left open.

The young woman did the shopping every morning and cooked the meals.

The Beard rarely went out, but spent most of his days stretched on the iron bedstead, reading Polish newspapers which he had one of the gang buy for him at the newspaper kiosk in the Place de la Bastille. Once the errand boy brought back an American fact-detective magazine in addition to the Polish periodicals. They all read that.

One-Eye went out often, always followed by one of Maigret's detectives. A fact of which he was probably aware, since he never did more than take long walks through Paris, stopping in many bars but never speaking to a soul.

As for the rest, they were what Lucas called "the floating population." People came and went, always the same lot, four or five of them. Olga fed them, and sometimes they slept on the floor overnight. There was nothing odd about this; it happens in all hotels with poor tenants—exiles who get together to rent a room and then put up any of their compatriots they come across.

On the floating population Maigret had a few notes:

1. The Chemist, so called because he had twice visited the Work Exchange to apply for a job in a chemical plant. His clothes were badly worn, but rather well cut. For hours he

would wander around the streets of Paris like a man looking for any way to earn a little money; and once, for a whole day, he was employed as a sandwich-man.

2. Spinach, named after the implausible spinach-green hat which seemed even more unlikely in view of his faded pink shirt. Spinach went out particularly in the evenings, when he picked up tips opening car doors in front of the Montmartre bars.

3. Puffy, a fat, wheezy little man, better dressed than the others even if his shoes were not mates.

And there were two others who visited the hotel less regularly; it was hard to say if they belonged to the gang.

Maigret stared at the notes with the exasperated feeling that the most important detail was somehow eluding him. Finally he picked up his pen again and wrote: *These people give the impression of penniless foreigners, looking for any kind of work at all. But there's always vodka in the rooms, and sometimes impressive spreads of food. Maybe the gang knows it's being watched, and is putting on an act for the police. If one of them is Stan the Killer, it is probably either The Beard or One-Eye. But this is only guesswork.*

It was without the least enthusiasm that he brought his report to the chief.

"Nothing new?"

"Nothing specific. I'd swear the rascals have spotted one of our men and are simply amusing themselves seeing how often they can come in and go out on innocent errands. They know we can't keep a large section of the force mobilized on their account forever. Time's on their side; they have lots of it..."

"You have a plan?"

"Look, chief. You know that ideas and I haven't been on speaking terms for a long time. I come and I go and I sniff around. You'll hear people say I'm waiting for inspiration; they're way off the track. What I'm waiting for is the one significant happening that never fails to turn up. The whole thing is being there when it does turn up so that I can take advantage of it."

"So you're waiting for a...happening?" The chief smiled. He knew this man.

"This much I'm convinced of: this is the Polish gang. Because of that fool of a reporter who keeps hanging around here picking up scraps of conversation, they're on their guard. Now what I want to know is, why did Stan write to me? Maybe because he

knows the police always hesitate to make a forcible arrest? More probably out of sheer bravado. These killers have their pride—you might almost say, professional pride. But which of them is Stan? And why that nickname? It's more American than Polish.

"You know how I take my time before I reach any conclusions. Well, it's beginning to come . . . The last two or three days I've begun to get the feel of the psychology of these boys. Very different from French murderers.

"They need money, not to retire to the country, or to have a fling in the night spots, or to clear out to foreign parts—but just simply to live their own lives, which to them means doing nothing, eating, drinking, sleeping, spending your days stretched out on a bed, smoking cigarettes, and killing bottles of vodka. And they have this longing to be together—to dream together, gossip together, some nights sing together.

"The way I see it, after their first crime they lived like this until the money ran out; then they got ready for another job. Whenever the funds are low, they start in again, coldly, without remorse, without a trace of pity for the old people whose throats they cut—and whose life's savings they eat up

in a few weeks or months . . . And now that I've got the feel of it, I'm waiting—"

"I know. For the happening . . ." the director smiled.

"Joke about it all you want. Just the same the happening may be here already."

"Where?"

"In the waiting-room. The little man who calls me Maigrette and who wants at all costs to help in the arrest, even if it costs him his skin. He claims it's just another method of suicide."

"A crackpot?"

"Could be. Or an accomplice of Stan's who's, using this method of keeping in touch with what we're doing. Any hypothesis fits; that's what makes my character with the creosote cigar so fascinating."

Maigret emptied his pipe by tapping it gently on the window ledge, so that the ashes fell somewhere on the Quai des Orfèvres, perhaps on the hat of a passerby.

"He bothers me, that little man," he added. "I've seen his face somewhere. It's not in our files, but I've seen it. And I've seen the girl, too, the blonde; she's worth remembering. None of the others. Just those two."

The director of the Judiciary Police leaned forward. "We've been going on the assumption that the blonde is Stan's

mistress. You associate her and the little man. You see the possible implication?"

"That my little man is Stan himself? Could be."

"Are you going to accept this man's offer?"

"I think so." The Inspector headed for the door. He felt he'd said enough. "You'll see, chief. I'll be amazed if we still need the stake-out by the end of this week."

And this was Thursday afternoon.

"Sit down! Doesn't it get on your nerves to suck at that filthy creosote cigar all day?"

"No, Monsieur Maigrette."

"That 'Maigrette' of yours is beginning to get me . . . But anyway; let's get down to business. Are you still set on dying?"

"Yes, Monsieur Maigrette."

"And you still want to be entrusted with a perilous mission?"

"I wish to help you to arrest Stan the Killer."

"So if I told you to go up to One-Eye and fire a bullet into his leg, you'd do it?"

"Yes, Monsieur Maigrette. But you would first have to give me a revolver. I am a poor man and—"

"Now suppose I tell you to go to The Beard or One-Eye and say you have important

information—that the police are coming to arrest them?"

"Gladly, Monsieur Maigrette. I shall wait until One-Eye passes by in the street and then I shall perform my commission."

The lowering gaze of the Inspector had no effect on the little Pole. Rarely had Maigret seen a man who combined such self-assurance with such utter serenity. Michael Ozep spoke of killing himself or of visiting the Polish gang as simply, as naturally, as he might refer to brushing his teeth. He was as much at ease in police headquarters as in the *Barrel of Burgundy*.

"You've never met either of them?"

"No, Monsieur Maigrette."

"All right. I'm going to give you the job. And if there's any trouble, it's on your head." Maigret lowered his eyelids to conceal his too sharp interest in the other's reaction. "In a minute we'll go together to the Rue Saint-Antoine. I'll wait for you outside. You'll go up to the room, picking a time when the woman is there alone. You'll tell her you're a fellow Pole and you happened by chance to learn that the police are raiding the hotel tonight . . ."

Ozep said nothing.

"You understand?"

"Yes."

"It's all set?"

"I must confess something to you, Monsieur Maigrette..."

"You're turning yellow?"

"Yellow? I do not understand! yes. No, I am not turning yellow. But I should prefer to arrange the matter in a different way. You may think that I am taking much upon myself... is that how I say it? But I am a timid man with the ladies. And the ladies are intelligent, far more intelligent than we men. Therefore, she will see that I am lying. And because I know that she will see that I am lying, I shall blush. And when I blush..."

Maigret sat motionless, absorbing this unlikely explanation.

"I should prefer to talk to a man. To the one with the beard, if you like, or the one you call One-Eye, or anyone at all..."

A ray of sunlight pierced slantwise through the office and lit full on Maigret's face. He seemed to be dozing, like a man whose injudiciously heavy lunch obliges him to take a siesta at his desk.

"It is exactly the same thing, Monsieur Maigrette..."

But Monsieur Maigrette did not answer. The only sign that he was still alive was the slim blue spiral which rose from his pipe.

"I am desolated. You can ask of me what you wish; but you demand precisely the one thing which—"

"Stuff it!"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I say, 'Stuff it!' Which means, in French, to shut up. Where did you know the woman Olga Tzerewski?"

"I?"

"Answer me!"

"I do not understand what you mean..."

"Answer me!"

"I do not know this woman. If I knew her, I would tell you so. I am a former officer of the Polish Army and if I had not suffered misfortunes—"

"Where did you know her?"

"I swear to you, Monsieur Maigrette, by the head of my sainted mother and my poor father—"

"Where did you know her?"

"Why have you suddenly stopped being nice to me? You talk to me so brutally! To me who came here to place myself at your disposal, to prevent Frenchmen from being murdered by a compatriot—"

"Cut the pitch!"

"Pitch?"

"Sales talk, to you. You aren't selling me."

"Ask anything of me, no matter what—"

"That's what I'm doing!"

"Ask me anything else—to

throw myself under a subway train—"

"I'm asking you to go see that woman and tell her that we'll make a raid tonight."

"You insist?"

"Take it or leave it."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then you'd better see to it that I never lay eyes on you again."

"Are you really going to arrest the gang tonight?"

"Probably."

"And you will allow me to help you?"

"Possibly. We'll see about that when you've finished your first job."

"At what time?"

"Your job?"

"No. At what time will you make the raid?"

"Let's say one in the morning."

"I am going."

"Where?"

"To find the woman."

"Just a minute! We're going together."

"It is better that I go alone. If one of them sees us, he will understand that I am assisting the police . . ."

The Pole had hardly left the office, of course, before the Inspector had set a detective at his heels.

"Should I keep under cover?" the detective asked.

"No use. He's smarter than

you are and he knows very well I'll have him followed."

And without losing a moment Maigret hurried downstairs and leaped into a taxi.

"Corner of Rue de Birague and Rue Saint-Antoine, as fast as you can make it!"

It was a radiant afternoon. Striped awnings lent a note of color to the shops. In their shadows dogs sprawled and napped, and all life seemed to run in slow motion. You felt that even the buses had a hard time making headway in the hot heavy air. Their wheels left tracks in the heated asphalt.

Maigret sprang out of the taxi into the house on the corner. On the second floor he opened a door without bothering to knock and found Lucas sitting at the window, still in the role of a quiet and curious elderly gentleman.

The room was shabby but clean. On the table lay the remains of a cold meal that Lucas had had sent up from a delicatessen.

"Anything new, Inspector?"

"Anybody at home across the way?"

The room had been chosen for its strategic position; you could see straight into the two rooms of the Hotel Beauséjour which the Poles occupied.

In this heat all the windows

stood wide open, including the window of another room which revealed a young girl asleep and scantily clad.

"Well, well, Lucas! Looks like you don't find your job too boring . . ."

A pair of field glasses on a chair gave evidence that Lucas attended to his work conscientiously and missed no detail, however slight.

"At the moment," said the sergeant, "there are two of them in the rooms, but there'll be only one in a minute. The man's getting dressed. He stayed in bed all morning, as usual."

"That's The Beard?"

"Yes. There were three of them for lunch: The Beard, the woman, and One-Eye. One-Eye left as soon as he'd eaten. Then The Beard got up and began to dress . . . Well! He's just put on a clean shirt. That doesn't happen very often."

Maigret came to the window to take his turn watching. The hairy giant was knotting his tie. The white shirt made an unexpected and therefore all the more dazzling splotch in the gray room.

You could see the man's lips move as he looked at himself in the mirror. Behind him the blonde woman was cleaning up, gathering gray papers and rolling them into a ball, turning

off the alcohol stove, dusting the frame of a bright-colored picture on the wall.

"If only we knew what they're saying!" Lucas sighed. "There are times when it drives me crazy. I watch them talking and talking and they never stop. They wave their arms around and I can't even guess what it's all about."

"The limitless resources of the police," said Maigret drily, "do not include a lip-reader who knows Polish."

"It gets on my nerves. I'm beginning to understand the torture it must be to be deaf. I'm beginning to see why people afflicted that way are generally so cranky."

"Don't talk so much! Do you think the woman will stay there?"

"This isn't the time she usually goes out. And if she meant to, she would have put on her gray suit."

Olga was wearing the same dark wool dress in which she had done her marketing that morning. While she cleaned up her bohemian establishment, she kept smoking a cigarette without ever taking it from her lips, in the fashion of the true smoker who needs tobacco from morning till night.

"She never talks," Maigret observed.

"This isn't the time she does

that, either. It's in the evenings that she gets to talking, when they're all gathered around her. Or a few times when she's alone with the one I call Spinach—which doesn't happen very often. Either I'm badly mistaken or she has a weakness for Spinach. He's the best-looking of the lot."

It was a strange sensation to be in an unknown room like this, to look into the lives of people and come to know their smallest gestures.

"You're getting as snoopy as a concierge, Lucas."

"That's what I'm here for, isn't it? I can tell you that the little girl over there—the one who's sleeping so soundly—was making love last night until three in the morning with a young man with an Ascot tie, who left at dawn, undoubtedly so he could get into his family's house unnoticed... Hold on! Now The Beard's leaving."

"Look at that, will you! He's practically elegant!"

"You might say so. But he looks more like a foreign wrestler than a man of the world."

"Well, let's say a wrestler who's doing good business."

No goodbye kiss across the way. The man simply went—that is, he disappeared from the part of the room visible from the police observatory.

A little later he emerged onto the sidewalk and set off toward the Place de la Bastille.

"Derain will pick him up," Lucas announced, sitting there like a huge spider at the center of his web. "But he knows he's being followed. He won't do anything but walk around and maybe pick up a drink somewhere."

As for the woman, she had taken a road map out of a drawer and spread it on the table.

Ozep couldn't have taken a taxi, Maigret calculated; he must have come by subway, in which case he should arrive at any moment. "If he's coming..." he corrected himself.

And he did come. They saw him arrive, hesitate, wander up and down the sidewalk, while the detective trailing him displayed great interest in a fish stall in the Rue Saint-Antoine.

Seen from above like this, the tiny Pole seemed even thinner, even more insignificant. Maigret experienced, for a moment, a pang of remorse. He could hear the poor devil's voice repeating a hundred times, in involved explanation, his famous "Monsieur Maigrette..."

He was hesitating, that was obvious. He seemed even to be afraid, to stare around him with a visible anguish.

"Do you know what he's looking for?" the Inspector asked Lucas.

"The little pale fellow? No. Maybe some money to get into the hotel?"

"He's looking for me. He's saying to himself that I must be somewhere around and if by some miracle I've changed my mind..."

Too late to change now; Michale Ozep had plunged into the dark hallway of the hotel. They could follow him in their minds. He would be climbing the stairs, reaching the second floor...

"He's still stalling," Maigret announced. The door should have opened before this. "He's on the landing. He's going to knock. He's knocked—look!"

The blonde girl trembled, shoved the map, with an instinctive movement, back in the dresser, and went toward the door. For a moment they could see nothing. The two were in the invisible part of the room. Then suddenly the woman appeared. Something about her had changed. Her steps were fast, decisive. She went straight to the window, closed it, then drew the dark curtains.

Lucas turned to the Inspector with a quizzical smile. "Think of that!" he laughed. But his smile faded as he

noticed that Maigret was far more concerned than he had expected.

"What time is it, Lucas?"

"Three ten."

"In your opinion, what are the chances that one of the gang will come back to the hotel in the next hour?"

"I doubt it. Unless, as I was telling you, Spinach, if he knows The Beard is out of the way. You don't look very happy about things."

"I don't like the way she closed that window."

"Are you afraid for your little Pole?"

Maigret made no answer.

"Have you thought," Lucas went on, "that we haven't any real proof that he is in that room? It's true we saw him go into the hotel. But he might perfectly well have gone to some other room, while somebody else came—"

Maigret shrugged his shoulders and sighed.

"What time is it, Lucas?"

"Three twenty."

"Do you know what's going to happen?"

"Do you want to go over and see what's happening across the way?"

"Not yet. But I'm probably going to make a fool of myself... Where can you telephone?"

"In the next room. He's a tailor who does piece work for one of the big houses, so he has to have a phone."

"Go to your tailor then. Try not to let him listen in. Telephone the chief, and tell him I want him to send me twenty armed men at once. They're to spread a cordon around the Hotel Beauséjour and wait for my signal."

Lucas's expression indicated the seriousness of this order, so out of character for Maigret, who usually laughed at police mobilization. "You think there'll be dirty work going on?"

"If it hasn't already gone on..."

His eyes remained fixed on the window, on the filthy glass panes, on the crimson velvet curtains of the time of Louis-Philippe.

When Lucas came back from the telephone, he found the Inspector still in the same place, still frowning thoughtfully.

"The boss says please be careful. There was a detective killed only last week, and now if there should be another accident—"

"Shut up, will you?"

"Do you think that Stan the Killer—"

"I don't think anything! I've thought so much about this case since this morning that I've

got a headache. Now I'm satisfied just to have impressions; and if you want to know, I have the impression that some disagreeable things are happening or are about to happen. What time is it?"

"Twenty-three after."

In the neighboring room the young girl was still asleep, her mouth open, her legs bent back. Higher up, on the fifth or sixth floor, somebody was trying to play an accordion, incessantly repeating, with the same false notes, the same fox-trot refrain.

"Do you want me to go over?" Lucas suggested.

Maigret gave him a harsh look, as if his subordinate had reproached him for lack of courage. "Just what do you mean by that?"

"Nothing. I can't help seeing you're worried about what may be going on over there, and I thought I could go and check—"

"And you think I'd hesitate to go myself? You're forgetting one thing: once we're over there, it's too late. If we go and find nothing, we'll never pin anything on that gang. That's why I'm hesitating... If only that wench hadn't closed the window!" He suddenly lifted his eyebrows. "Tell me: the other times, when she's been alone with a man, she's never closed the window, has she?"

"Never."

"Then she hadn't any suspicion of your presence here."

"She probably took me for just another foolish old man."

"So it isn't the girl who had the idea of closing the window, but the character who came in."

"Ozep?"

"Ozep or somebody else. It's the one who came in who told the girl to close the window before he showed himself."

He took his hat from the chair, emptied his pipe, scraped the bowl with his index finger.

"Where are you going, boss?"

"I'm waiting for our men to get here... Look! There are two of them by the bus stop. And I recognize some others in that parked taxi... If I stay inside five minutes without opening that window, you'll come in with our men."

"You have your gun?"

A few moments later Lucas could see Maigret crossing the street, could see Detective Janvier notice him and break off his task of wiping the tables on the terrace.

After what seemed a miraculously short interval, the window across the way opened. Maigret signaled to his sergeant to join him.

From across the street Lucas

had gathered that the room was empty save for the Inspector. He stumbled up a dark staircase through the stench of bad cooking and worse plumbing and entered the room, only to start back as he found the body of a woman stretched out at his feet.

"Dead, of course," Maigret grunted.

It was as if the murderer had wished to leave his signature on his crime. The woman's throat had been cut, as with all the other victims of Stan. There was blood everywhere.

The bright picture on the wall turned out, on closer inspection, to be a portrait of Olga—even blonder, even more fresh-skinned than she had been in life. Lucas looked from the lushly alluring portrait to the unappetizing sight on the floor. He felt oddly like a drinking man who sees a bottle of fine brandy smashed.

"It was your Pole?"

Maigret shrugged his shoulders, still standing rooted in the middle of the room.

"Shall I give his description to our men so they can see that he doesn't leave the hotel?"

"If you wish."

"I'd like to put a man on the roof, just in case—"

"Go ahead."

"Shall I call the chief?"

"In a minute."

It was no easy job to talk with Maigret when he was like this. Lucas tried to put himself in his shoes. Maigret himself had said he'd make a fool of himself. But this was worse than looking foolish. He had mobilized a large body of police when it was too late, when the crime had already been committed under Maigret's very eyes—almost with his consent, since he'd been the one who had sent Ozep into the Hotel Beauséjour.

"And if any of the gang come back, shall I arrest them?"

An affirmative nod. Or rather a gesture of indifference. And at last Lucas went out.

"Where's Maigret?" the chief demanded of Lucas before he was halfway out of his car.

"In the room. Number nineteen on the second floor. The people in the hotel don't know about it yet."

A few moments later the director of the Judiciary Police found Maigret sitting in a chair in the middle of the room, two steps from the body.

"Well, my friend! It looks to me as though we were in a pretty fix!"

For answer he received a grunt.

"So the notorious killer was none other than the little man

who offered you his services! You must admit, Maigret, you might have been somewhat less trustful; Ozep's attitude was, to say the least, suspicious . . ."

A heavy vertical furrow seamed Maigret's brow and his jaws jutted out, giving his whole face a striking quality of power.

"You think he hasn't managed to slip out of the hotel yet?"

"I'm sure of it," the Inspector replied, as if he attached not the least importance to the matter.

"You haven't searched the hotel?"

"Not yet."

"You think he'll let himself be captured easily?"

Then Maigret's gaze detached itself slowly from the window, shifted toward the director.

"If I'm wrong, the man will try to kill as many people as he can before he's arrested. If I'm not wrong, things will take care of themselves."

"I don't understand, Maigret."

"I tell you again, chief: I can be wrong. Anybody can be wrong. In that case, I beg your pardon, because there's going to be trouble. The way this case seems to have solved itself doesn't satisfy me. There's something that doesn't fit, I can feel it. If Ozep was Stan, there

was no reason why..." His voice trailed off.

"You're staying here, Maigret?"

"Pending further instructions, yes."

"Meanwhile, I'll go see what our men are doing outside."

They had arrested Spinach when, as Lucas had foreseen, he had come to pay his call on the young woman. When they told him that Olga had been killed, he turned pale; but he showed no reaction when they spoke of Ozep.

When this arrest was announced to Maigret, he merely mumbled, "What's it to me?" and resumed his strange tête-à-tête with the dead woman.

A half hour later it was One-Eye's turn to come home and be arrested on the threshold. He submitted impassively; but when they told him of the woman's death, he tried to break free from his handcuffs and leap upstairs.

"Who did it?" he shouted. "Who killed her? One of you, wasn't it?"

"It was Ozep, alias Stan the Killer."

The man quieted down as if by magic. He frowned as he repeated, "Ozep?"

"You aren't going to tell us you didn't know your boss's real name?"

It was the chief in person

who conducted this hasty questioning in a corridor, and he had the impression that a faint smile crossed the prisoner's lips.

Then came another of the gang, the one they called The Chemist. He simply answered all questions with an air of absolute confusion, as if he had never heard of the woman nor of Ozep nor of Stan.

Maigret was still upstairs, mulling over the same problem, hunting for the key that would at last enable him to understand what had happened.

"All right..." he murmured when Lucas told him of the arrest of The Beard, who had begun by raging like a fiend and ended by bawling like a calf.

Suddenly he raised his head. "Do you notice something, Lucas? That's four that they've arrested, and not one of them's put up any real resistance. Whereas a man like Stan—"

"But since Stan is Ozep—"

"Have you found him?"

"Not yet. We had to let all the accomplices come home before we turned the hotel upside down. If they got a whiff of anything wrong, they'd never come into the mouse-trap. Now that we have almost all of them, the big boss is laying siege. Our men are downstairs and they're going to go through everything."

"Listen, Lucas . . ."

The sergeant had been about to leave. He paused, feeling for Maigret something akin to pity.

"One-Eye is not Stan. Spinach is not Stan. The Beard is not Stan. But I'm convinced that Stan lived in this hotel and was the focus around which the others gathered."

Lucas thought it better to say nothing. Let the Inspector have his monomania.

"If Ozep was Stan, he had no reason to come here to kill an accomplice. If he was not Stan . . ."

Suddenly Maigret rose, crossed to the wall and pulled down the brightly colored picture of Olga. He tore away the tape that framed it, revealing lines of lettering above and below the face. He handed it to Lucas.

The sergeant knew enough English to make out both the line above:

Real Life Detective Cases
and the lines below:

THE PRETTY POLE AND THE
TERROR OF TERRE HAUTE

Maigret was smiling now. "Vanity," he said. "They can't ever resist it. They had to buy the magazine when they saw it on the stands, and she had to frame the picture."

"I knew I'd seen her face before. I do remember the case roughly. I kept some clippings

on it. Very similar to ours. In the Middle West of America, four or five years ago. A gang attacking lonely farms, cutting throats . . . just like ours . . . and they had a woman leader. The American press took great pleasure in describing her atrocities."

"Then Stan . . .?"

"... was Olga. Almost certainly. I'll be positive in an hour, now that I know what to look for in the office. Are you coming with me, Lucas?"

"But Ozep?" Lucas asked, as they settled back in the cab.

"It's Ozep I especially want to look up. That is, I'm hoping I'll find something about him. If he killed this woman, he must have had a motive. . . Listen, Lucas: when I wanted to send him to the others, he agreed at once. But when I gave him an errand to the woman, he refused, and I was forced to use pressure, even to threaten him. In other words, the rest of the gang did not know him—but *the woman did.*"

It took a good half-hour to find the clippings in question. Order was not Maigret's dominant attribute.

"Read this! Always allowing for the exaggeration of the American press—they like to give the readers their money's worth. 'The Female Fiend . . .' 'The Deadly Pole . . .' 'Girl, 23,

Heads Murder Gang . . . ”

The press reveled in the exploits of the Polish girl and furnished many proofs of her photogenic qualities.

At eighteen Stephanie Polintskaja was already known to the Warsaw police. Around this time she met a man who married her and strove to curb her evil instincts. She had a child by him. One day the man came home from work to find that his wife had vanished with all the money and jewelry. The child's throat had been cut.

“You know who that man was?” Maigret asked.

“Ozep?”

“Here's his picture, and a good likeness. You understand now? Stephanie, nicknamed Stan, ran wild in America. How she escaped the American prisons I do not know. In any case she took refuge in France, surrounded herself with a fresh lot of brutes, and took up her old career.

“Her husband learns from the papers that she is in Paris, that the police are on her trail. Does he want to rescue her once more? I doubt it. I'm rather inclined to think that he wants to make sure that the detestable murderess of his child shall not escape punishment. That's why he offers me his services. He hadn't the guts to work alone. He's too much

of a weakling. He needs the police to help him. And then, this afternoon, I force his hand . . .

“Face to face with his former wife; what can he do? Kill or be killed! She certainly would not hesitate to destroy the only man outside the gang who could testify against her.

“So he killed . . . And do you want to know what I think? I'm betting that they'll find him somewhere in the hotel, more or less seriously wounded. After mugging two attempts at suicide, it would amaze me if he muffed the third. Now you can go back to the hotel and—”

“No use!” It was the chief's voice. “Stan the Killer hanged himself in a vacant room on the sixth floor. Good riddance!”

“He made it,” Maigret sighed. “Poor devil!”

“You're sorry for him?”

“Indeed I am. Especially since I'm somewhat responsible for his death . . . I don't know if it means I'm getting old; but I certainly took long enough to find the solution—”

“What solution?” the director asked suspiciously.

“The solution to the whole problem!” Lucas intervened happily. “The Inspector has reconstructed the case in all its details.”

“That so, Maigret?”

"It is . . . You know, if you keep mulling over the same question . . . I don't think I've ever been so mad at myself in my life. I felt that the solution was there, within reach; that just one little touch . . . And you all kept buzzing around me like horseflies, telling me about arrests that didn't mean a thing . . . And then I remembered the American detective

magazine and the woman's face on the cover . . ."

Maigret took a deep breath, loaded his pipe, and asked Lucas for matches. The afternoon vigil had used up all his.

"What do you say, chief? It's seven o'clock. Suppose we three settle down to a nice glass of beer? Provided that Lucas gets rid of his wig and makes himself respectable again."



H. G. Wells

A Deal in Ostriches

H. G. Wells has been called "one of the titans of modern English literature." Whatever posterity may decide, he was certainly one of the most versatile writers who ever lived. Serious novelist, historian, scientific writer, and fantasist extraordinary, he averaged more than a book a year from 1895 until his death in 1946. Mr. Wells's serious novels included such magnificent books as ANN VERONICA, TONO-BUNGAY, and THE HISTORY OF MR. POLLY; his work in history and science—such monumental achievements as THE OUTLINE OF HISTORY, and (in collaboration with his son and Julian Huxley) THE SCIENCE OF LIFE; and his science fiction—such classics as THE TIME MACHINE, THE INVISIBLE MAN, and WHEN THE SLEEPER AWAKES. All told, H. G. Wells's life was one of inspiring courage in the face of ill health, and spectacular success in the face of devastating criticism. Early in the Twentieth Century, with the publication of KIPPS: THE STORY OF A SIMPLE SOUL, Mr. Wells discovered that he possessed a rich store of humor. Here is a short tale—a humorous crime story written even before KIPPS—which might be said to have anticipated, in respect to the lighter side of Mr. Wells's work, "the shape of things to come"...

66 **T**ALKING OF THE prices of birds, I've seen an ostrich that cost three hundred pounds," said the Taxidermist, recalling his youth of travel. "Three hundred pounds!" He looked at me over his spectacles. "I've seen one that was refused at four.

"No," he said, "it wasn't any fancy points. They was just plain ostriches. A little off color, too—owing to dietary. And there wasn't any particular restriction of the demand either. You'd have thought five ostriches would have ruled cheap on an East Indiaman. But

the point was, one of 'em had swallowed a diamond.

"The chap it got it off was Sir Mohini Padishah, a tremendous swell, a Piccadilly swell, you might say, up to the neck of him, and then a big ugly head and a whopping turban, with this diamond in it. The blessed bird pecked suddenly and had it, and when the chap made a fuss it realized it had done wrong, I suppose, and went and mixed itself with the others to preserve its *incog*. It all happened in a minute. I was among the first to arrive, and there was this heathen going over his gods, and two sailors and the man who had charge of the birds laughing fit to split. It was a rummy way of losing a jewel, come to think of it. The man in charge hadn't been about just at the moment, so that he didn't know which bird it was. Clean lost, you see. I didn't feel half sorry, to tell you the truth. The beggar had been swaggering over his blessed diamond ever since he came aboard.

"A thing like that goes from stem to stern of a ship in no time. Everyone was talking about it. Padishah went below to hide his feelings. At dinner the captain kind of jeered at him about it, and he got very excited. He turned round and talked into my ear. He would

not buy the birds; he would have his diamond. He demanded his rights as a British subject. His diamond must be found. He was firm upon that. He would appeal to the House of Lords. The man in charge of the birds was one of those wooden-headed chaps you can't get a new idea into anyhow. He refused any proposal to interfere with the birds by way of medicine. His instructions were to feed them so-and-so and treat them so-and-so, and it was as much as his place was worth not to feed them so-and-so and treat them so-and-so. Padishah had wanted a stomach-pump—though you can't do that to a bird, you know. This Padishah was full of bad law, like most of these blessed Bengalis, and talked of having a lien on the birds, and so forth. But an old boy, who said his son was a London barrister, argued, that what a bird swallowed became *ipso facto* part of the bird, and that Padishah's only remedy lay in an action for damages, and even then it might be possible to show contributory negligence. He hadn't any right of way about an ostrich that didn't belong to him. That upset Padishah extremely, the more so as most of us expressed an opinion that that was the reasonable view. There wasn't any lawyer aboard to settle the

matter, so we all talked pretty free. At last, after Aden, it appears that he came round to the general opinion, and went privately to the man in charge and made an offer for all five ostriches.

"The next morning there was a fine shindy at breakfast. The man hadn't any authority to deal with the birds, and nothing on earth would induce him to sell; but it seems he told Padishah that a Eurasian named Potter had already made him an offer, and on that Padishah denounced Potter before us all. But I think the most of us thought it rather smart of Potter, and I know that when Potter said he'd wired at Aden to London to buy the birds, and would have an answer at Suez, I cursed pretty richly at a lost opportunity.

"At Suez, Padishah gave way to tears—actual wet tears—when Potter became the owner of the birds, and offered him two hundred and fifty right off for the five, being more than two hundred per cent on what Potter had given. Potter said he'd be hanged if he parted with a feather of them—that he meant to kill them off one by one and find the diamond; but afterwards, thinking it over, he relented a little. He was a gambling hound, was this Potter, a little queer at cards,

and this kind of prize-pocket business must have suited him down to the ground. Anyhow, he offered, for a lark, to sell the birds separately to separate people, by auction, at a starting price of £80 for a bird. But one, he said, he meant to keep for luck.

"You must understand this diamond was a valuable one—a little chap, a diamond merchant, who was with us, had put it at three or four thousand when Padishah had shown it to him—and this idea of an ostrich gamble caught on. Now it happened that I'd been having a few talks on general subjects with the man who looked after these ostriches, and quite incidentally he'd said one of the birds was ailing, and he fancied it had indigestion. It had one feather in its tail almost all white, by which I knew it, and so when, next day, the auction started with it, I capped Padishah's eighty-five by ninety. I fancy I was a bit too sure and eager with my bird, and some of the others spotted the fact that I was in the know. And Padishah went for that particular bird like an irresponsible lunatic. At last the diamond merchant got it for £175, and Padishah said £180 just after the hammer came down—so Potter declared. At any rate the merchant secured

it, and there and then he got a gun and shot it. Potter made a Hades of a fuss because he said it would injure the sale of the other three, and Padishah, of course, behaved like an idiot; but all of us were very much excited. I can tell you I was precious glad when that dissection was over, and no diamond had turned up—precious glad. I'd gone to one-forty on that particular bird myself.

"Potter declined to go on with the auction until it was understood that the goods could not be delivered until the sale was over. The little diamond merchant wanted to argue that the case was exceptional, and as the discussion ran pretty even, the thing was postponed until the next morning. We had a lively dinner-table that evening, I can tell you, but in the end Potter got his way, since it would stand to reason he would be safer if he stuck to all the birds, and we owed him some consideration for his sportsman-like behavior. And the old gentleman whose son was a lawyer said it was very doubtful if, when a bird had been opened and the diamond recovered, it ought not to be handed back to the proper owner. I remember I suggested it came under the laws of treasure-trove—which was really the truth of the

matter. There was a hot argument, and we settled it was certainly foolish to kill the bird on board the ship. Then the old gentleman tried to make out the sale was a lottery and illegal, and appealed to the captain; but Potter said he sold the birds *as* ostriches. He didn't want to sell any diamonds, he said, and didn't offer that as an inducement. The three birds he put up, to the best of his knowledge and belief, did *not* contain a diamond. It was in the one he kept—so he hoped.

"Prices ruled high next day. The fact that now there were four chances instead of five of course caused a rise. The blessed birds averaged £227, and, oddly enough, this Padishah didn't secure one of 'em—not one. He made too much shindy, and when he ought to have been bidding he was talking about liens, and, besides, Potter was a bit down on him. One fell to a quiet little officer chap, another to the little diamond merchant, and the third was syndicated by the engineers. And then Potter seemed suddenly sorry for having sold them, and said he'd flung away a clear thousand pounds, and that he always had been a fool, but when I went and had a bit of a talk to him, with the idea of getting him to hedge on his last chance, I

found he'd already sold the bird he'd reserved to a political chap that was on board, a chap who'd been studying Indian morals and social questions in his vacation. That last was the three-hundred-pound bird. Well, they landed three of the blessed creatures at Brindisi—though the old gentleman said it was a breach of the Customs regulations—and Potter and Padishah landed, too. The Hindoo seemed half-mad as he saw his blessed diamond going this way and that, so to speak. He kept on saying he'd get an injunction—he had injunction on the brain—and giving his name and address to the chaps who'd bought the birds, so that they'd know where to send the diamond. None of them wanted his name and address, and none of them would give their own. It was a fine row, I can tell you—on the platform. They all went off by different trains. I

came on to Southampton, and there I saw the last of the birds, as I came ashore; it was the one the engineers had bought, and it was standing up near the bridge, in a kind of crate, and looking as leggy and silly a setting for a valuable diamond as ever you saw—if it *was* a setting for a valuable diamond.

“*How did it end?* Oh! like that. Well—perhaps. Yes, there's one more thing that may throw light on it. A week or so after landing I was down Regent Street doing a bit of shopping, and who should I see arm-in-arm and having a purple time of it but Padishah and Potter. If you come to think of it—

“Yes: *I've* thought that. Only, you see, there's no doubt the diamond was real. And Padishah was an eminent Hindoo. I've seen his name in the papers—often. But whether the bird swallowed the diamond is certainly another matter.”

“Q”

John Dickson Carr

The Other Hangman

About the murder of Randall Fraser two and a half generations ago, when the best hotel in the county offered room and board for \$2 a week... This is perhaps John Dickson Carr's finest short story—which makes it one of the finest crime-suspense short stories written in our time.

66 **W**HY DO THEY ELEC-
trocute 'em instead of
hanging 'em in Pennsylvania?
What" (said my old friend,
Judge Murchison, dexterously
hooking the spittoon closer
with his foot) "do they teach
you youngsters in these new-
fangled law schools, anyway?

"That, son, was a murder
case. It turned the Supreme
Court's whiskers gray to find a
final ruling, and for thirty years
it's been argued about by
lawyers in the back room of
every saloon from here to the
Pacific coast. It happened right
here in this county—when they
hanged Fred Joliffe for the
murder of Randall Fraser.

"It was in '92 or '93;
anyway, it was the year they
put the first telephone in the
courthouse, and you could talk
as far as Pittsburgh except when
the wires blew down. Consider-
ing it was the county seat, we

were mighty proud of our town
(population 3,500).

"The hustlers were always
bragging about how thriving
and growing our town was, and
we had just got to the point of
enthusiasm where every ten
years we were certain the
census taker must have forgot-
ten half our population. Old
Mark Sturgis, who owned the
Bugle Gazette then, carried on
something awful in an editorial
when they printed in the
almanac that we had a
population of only 3,265. We
were all pretty riled about it,
naturally.

"We were proud of plenty of
other things, too. We had good
reason to brag about the
McClellan House, which was the
finest hotel in the county; and I
mind when you could get room
and board, with apple pie for
breakfast every morning, for
two dollars a week. We were

proud of our old county families that came over the mountains when Braddock's army was scalped by the Indians in 1755, and settled down in log huts to dry their wounds. But most of all we were proud of our legal batteries.

"Son, it was a grand assembly! Mind, I won't say that all of 'em were long on knowledge of the Statute Books; but they knew their *Blackstone* and their *Greenleaf on Evidence*, and they were powerful speakers. And there were some—the topnotchers—full of graces and book knowledge and dignity, who were hell on the exact letter of the law.

"Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, all of us, who loved a good debate and a bottle o' whiskey. There was Charley Connell, a Harvard graduate and the District Attorney, who had fine white hands, and wore a fine high collar, and made such pathetic addresses to the jury that people flocked for miles around to hear him; though he generally lost his cases. There was Judge Hunt, who prided himself on his resemblance to Abe Lincoln, and in consequence always wore a frock coat and an elegant plug hat.

"Why, there was your own grandfather, who had over two

hundred books in his library, and people used to go up nights to borrow volumes of the encyclopedia.

"You know the big stone courthouse at the top of the street, with the flowers round it, and the jail adjoining? People went there as they'd go to a picture show nowadays; it was a lot better, too. Well, from there it was only two minutes' walk across the meadow to Jim Riley's saloon. All the cronies gathered there—in the back room of course, where Jim had an elegant brass spittoon and a picture of George Washington on the wall to make it dignified. You could see the footpath worn across the grass until they built over that meadow.

"Besides the usual crowd, there was Bob Moran, the Sheriff, a fine, strapping big fellow, but very nervous about doing his duty strictly. And there was poor old Nabors, a big, quiet, reddish-eyed fellow, who'd been a doctor before he took to drink. He was always broke, and he had two daughters—one of 'em consumptive—and Jim Riley pitied him so much that he gave him all he wanted to drink for nothing.

"Those were fine happy days, with a power of eloquence and theorizing and solving the problems of the



nation in that back room, until our wives came to fetch us home.

"Then Randall Fraser was murdered, and there was hell to pay.

"Now if it had been anybody else but Fred Joliffe who killed him, naturally we wouldn't have convicted. You can't do it, son, not in a little community. It's all very well to talk about the power and grandeur of justice, and sounds fine in a speech. But here's somebody you've seen walking the streets about his business every day for years; and you know when his kids were born, and saw him crying when one of 'em died and you remember how he loaned you ten dollars when you needed it....

"Well, you can't take that person out in the cold light of day and string him up by the neck until he's dead. You'd always be seeing the look on his face afterwards. And you'd find excuses for him no matter what he did.

"But with Fred Joliffe it was different. Fred Joliffe was the worst and nastiest customer we ever had, with the possible exception of Randall Fraser himself. Ever seen a copperhead curled up on a flat stone? And a copperhead's worse than a rattlesnake—that won't strike unless you step on it, and gives

you warning before it does.

"Fred Joliffe had the same brownish color and sliding movements. You always remembered his pale little eyes and his nasty grin. When he drove his cart through town—he had some sort of rag-and-bone business, you understand—you'd see him sitting up there, a skinny little man in a brown coat, peeping round the side of his nose to find something for gossip. And grinning.

"It wasn't merely the things he said about people behind their backs. Or to their faces, for that matter, because he relied on the fact that he was too small to be thrashed. He was a slick customer. It was believed that he wrote those anonymous letters that caused ... but never mind that.

"Anyhow, I can tell you his little smirk *did* drive Will Farmer crazy one time, and Will *did* beat him within an inch of his life. Will's livery stable was burned down one night about a month later, with eleven horses inside, but nothing could ever be proved. He was too smart for us.

"That brings me to Fred Joliffe's only companion—I don't mean friend. Randall Fraser had a harness-and-saddle store in Market Street, a dusty place with a big dummy horse

in the window. I reckon the only thing in the world Randall liked was that dummy horse, which was a dappled mare with vicious-looking glass eyes. He used to keep its mane combed.

"Randall was a big man with a fine mustache, a horseshoe pin in his tie, and sporty checked clothes. He was but-tery polite, and mean as sin. He thought a dirty trick or a swindle was the funniest joke he ever heard. But the women liked him—a lot of them, it's no use denying, sneaked in at the back door of that harness store. Randall itched to tell it at the barber shop, to show what fools they were and how virile he was; but he had to be careful. He and Fred Joliffe did a lot of drinking together.

"Then the news came. It was in October, I think, and I heard it in the morning when I was putting on my hat to go down to the office. Old Withers was the Town Constable then. He got up early in the morning, although there was no need for it; and when he was going down Market Street in the mist about five o'clock, he saw the gas still burning in the back room of Randall's store.

"The front door was wide open. Withers went in and found Randall lying on a pile of harness in his shirtsleeves, and his forehead and face bashed in

with a wedging mallet. There wasn't much left of the face, but you could recognize him by his mustache and his horseshoe pin.

"I was in my office when somebody yelled up from the street that they had found Fred Joliffe drunk and asleep in the flour mill, with blood on his hands and an empty bottle of Randall Fraser's whiskey in his pocket. He was still in bad shape, and couldn't walk or understand what was going on, when the Sheriff—that was Bob Moran I told you about—came to take him to the lockup.

"Bob had to drive him in his own rag-and-bone cart. I saw them drive up Market Street in the rain, Fred lying in the back of the cart all white with flour, and rolling and cursing. People were very quiet. They were pleased, but they couldn't show it.

"That is, all except Will Farmer, who had owned the livery stable that was burned down.

"'Now they'll hang him,' says Will. 'Now, by God, they'll hang him.'

"It's a funny thing, son: I didn't realize the force of that until I heard Judge Hunt pronounce sentence after the trial. They appointed me to defend him, because I was a young man without any partic-

ular practice, and somebody had to do it. The evidence was all over town before I got a chance to speak with Fred.

"You could see he was done for. A scissors grinder who lived across the street (I forget his name now) had seen Fred go into Randall's place about eleven o'clock. An old couple who lived up over the store had heard 'em drinking and yelling downstairs; at near on midnight they'd heard a noise like a fight and a fall; but they knew better than to interfere. Finally, a couple of farmers driving home from town at midnight had seen Fred stumble out of the front door, slapping his clothes and wiping his hands on his coat like a man with delirium tremens.

"I went to see Fred at the jail. He was sober, although he jerked a good deal. Those pale watery eyes of his were as poisonous as ever. I can still see him sitting on the bunk in his cell, sucking a brown-paper cigarette, wriggling his neck, and jeering at me. He wouldn't tell me anything, because he said I would go and tell the judge if he did.

"*'Hang me?'* he says, and wrinkled his nose and jeered again. *'Hang me?'* Don't you worry about that, mister. Them so-and-so's will never hang me. They're too much afraid of me,

them so-and-so's are. Eh, mister?"

"And the fool couldn't get it through his head right up until the sentence. He strutted in court, making smart remarks, and threatening to tell what he knew about people, and calling the judge by his first name. He wore a new dickey shirt-front he bought to look spruce in.

"I was surprised how quietly everybody took it. The people who came to the trial didn't whisper or shove; they just sat still as death and looked at him. All you could hear was a kind of breathing.

"It's funny about a courtroom, son: it has its own particular smell, which won't bother you unless you get to thinking about what it means; but you notice worn places and cracks in the walls more than you would anywhere else. You would hear Charley Connell's voice for the prosecution, a little thin sound in a big room, and Charley's footsteps creaking. You would hear a cough in the audience, or a woman's dress rustle, or the gas jets whistling. It was dark in the rainy season, so they lit the gas jets by two o'clock in the afternoon.

"The only defense I could make was that Fred had been too drunk to be responsible, and remembered nothing of

that night (which he admitted was true). But, in addition to being no defense in law, it was a terrible frost besides. My own voice sounded wrong.

"I remember that six of the jury had whiskers, and six hadn't; and Judge Hunt, up on the bench with the flag draped on the wall behind his head, looked more like Abe Lincoln than ever. Even Fred Joliffe began to notice. He kept twitching round to look at the people, a little uneasy-like. Once he stuck out his neck at the jury and screeched, 'Say something, can'tcha? Do something, can'tcha?'

"They did.

"When the foreman of the jury said, 'Guilty of murder in the first degree,' there was just a little noise from those people. Not a cheer, or anything like that. It hissed out all together, only once, like breath released, but it was terrible to hear. It didn't hit Fred until Judge Hunt was halfway through pronouncing sentence.

"Fred stood looking round with a wild, half-witted expression until he heard Judge Hunt say, '*And may God have mercy on your soul.*' Then he burst out, kind of pleading and kidding as though this was carrying the joke too far. He said, 'Listen, now, you don't mean that, do you? You can't

fool me. You're only Jerry Hunt; I know who you are. You can't do that to me.' All of a sudden he began pounding the table and screaming, 'You ain't really a-goin' to hang me, are you?'

"But we were.

"The date of execution was fixed for the twelfth of November. The order was all signed. . . . within the precincts of the said county jail, between the hours of eight and nine A.M., the said Frederick Joliffe shall be hanged by the neck until he is dead; an executioner to be commissioned by the Sheriff for this purpose, and the sentence to be carried out in the presence of a qualified medical practitioner; the body to be interred . . . And the rest of it.

"Everybody was nervous. There hadn't been a hanging since any of that crowd had been in office, and nobody knew how to go about it exactly. Old Doc Macdonald, the Coroner, was to be there; and of course they got hold of Reverend Phelps, the preacher; and Bob Moran's wife was going to cook pancakes and sausage for the last breakfast.

"Maybe you think that's fool talk. But think for a minute of taking somebody you've known all your life, and binding his arms one cold

morning, and walking him out in your own back yard to crack his neck on a rope—all religious and legal, with not a soul to interfere. Then you begin to get scared of the powers of life and death, and the thin partition between.

"Bob Moran was scared white for fear things wouldn't go off properly. He had appointed big, slow-moving, tipsy Ed Nabors as hangman. This was partly because Ed Nabors needed the fifty dollars that was the fee, and partly because Bob had a vague idea that an ex-medical man would be better able to manage an execution. Ed had sworn to keep sober; Bob Moran said he wouldn't get a dime unless he *was* sober; but you couldn't always tell.

"Nabors seemed in earnest. He had studied up the matter of scientific hanging in an old book he borrowed from your grandfather, and he and the carpenter had knocked together a big, shaky-looking contraption in the jail yard.

"It worked all right in practice, with sacks of meal; the trap went down with a boom that brought your heart up in your throat. But once they allowed for too much spring in the rope and it tore a sack apart. Then old Doc Macdonald chipped in about that fellow

John Lee, in England—and it nearly finished Bob Moran.

"That was late on the night before the execution. We were sitting round the lamp in Bob's office, trying to play stud poker. There were tops and skipping ropes, all kinds of toys, all over that office. Bob let his kids play in there—which he shouldn't have done, because the door out of it led to a corridor of cells with Fred Joliffe in the last one.

"Of course, the few other prisoners, disorderlies and chicken thieves and the like, had been moved upstairs. Somebody had told Bob that the scent of an execution affects 'em like a cage of wild animals. Whoever it was, he was right. We could hear 'em shifting and stamping over our heads, and one old man was singing hymns all night long.

"Well, it was raining hard on the tin roof; maybe that was what put Doc Macdonald in mind of it. Doc was a cynical old devil. When he saw that Bob couldn't sit still, and would throw in his hand without even looking at the buried card, Doc says, 'Yes, I hope it'll go off all right. But you want to be careful about that rain. Did you read about that fellow they tried to hang in England?—and the rain had swelled the boards so's the trap wouldn't fall?

They stuck him on it three times, but still it wouldn't work . . .

"Ed Nabors slammed his hand down on the table. I reckon he felt bad enough as it was, because one of his daughters had run away and left him, and the other was dying of consumption. But he was twitchy and reddish about the eyes; he hadn't had a drink for two days, although there was a bottle on the table.

"Nabors says, 'You shut up or I'll kill you. Damn' you, Macdonald,' he says, and grabs the edge of the table. 'I tell you nothing *can* go wrong. I'll go out and test the thing again, if you'll let me put the rope around your neck.'

"And Bob Moran says, 'What do you want to talk like that for anyway, Doc? Ain't it bad enough as it is?' he says. 'Now you've got me worrying about something else,' he says. 'I went down there a-while ago to look at him, and he said the funniest thing I ever heard Fred Joliffe say. He's crazy. He giggled and said God wouldn't let them so-and-so's hang him. It was terrible, hearing Fred Joliffe talk like that. What time is it, somebody?'

"I was cold that night. I dozed off in a chair, hearing the rain, and that animal cage snuffing upstairs. The old man

was singing that part of the hymn about while the nearer waters roll, while the tempest still is high.

"They woke me about half-past eight to say that Judge Hunt and all the witnesses were out in the jail yard, and they were ready to start the march. Then I realized that they were really going to hang him after all. I had to join behind the procession as I was sworn, but I didn't see Fred Joliffe's face and I didn't want to see it.

"They had given him a good wash, and a clean flannel shirt that they tucked under at the neck. He stumbled coming out of the cell and started to go in the wrong direction; but Bob Moran and the Constable each had him by one arm. It was a cold dark windy morning. His hands were tied behind.

"The preacher was saying something I couldn't catch. Everything went off smoothly enough until they got halfway across the jail yard. It's a pretty big yard. I didn't look at the contraption in the middle, but at the witnesses standing over against the wall with their hats off; and I smelled the clean air after the rain, and looked up at the mountains where the sky was getting pink.

"But Fred Joliffe did not look at it, and went down flat on his knees. They hauled him

up again. I heard them keep on walking, and go up the steps, which were creaky.

"I didn't look at the contraption until I heard a thumping sound, and we all knew something was wrong.

"Fred Joliffe was not standing on the trap, nor was the bag pulled over his head, although his legs were strapped. He stood with his eyes closed and his face towards the pink sky. Ed Nabors was clinging with both hands to the rope, twirling round a little and stamping on the trap. It didn't budge.

"Just then I heard Ed crying something about the rain having swelled the boards, and Judge Hunt ran past me to the foot of the contraption.

"Bob Moran started cursing. 'Put him on and try it, anyway,' he says and grabs Fred's arm. 'Stick that bag over his head and give the thing a chance.'

"'In His name,' says the preacher, 'you'll not do it if I can help it.'

"Bob ran over like a crazy man and jumped on the trap with both feet. It was stuck fast. Then Bob turned round and pulled an Ivor-Johnson .45 out of his hip pocket. Judge Hunt got in front of Fred, whose lips were moving a little.

"'He'll have the law, and nothing but the law,' says Judge Hunt. 'Put that gun away, you

lunatic, and take him back to the cell until you can make the thing work. Easy with him, now.'

"To this day I don't think Fred Joliffe realized what had happened. I believe he only had his belief confirmed that they never meant to hang him after all. When he found himself going down the steps again, he opened his eyes. His face looked shrunken and dazed-like, but all of a sudden it came to him in a blaze.

"'I knew them so-and-so's would never hang me,' says he. His throat was so dry he couldn't spit at Judge Hunt, as he tried to do; but he marched straight and giggling across the yard. 'I knew them so-and-so's would never hang me,' he says.

"We all had to sit down a minute, and we had to give Ed Nabors a drink. Bob made him hurry up, although we didn't say much, and he was leaving to fix the trap again when the courthouse janitor came bustling into Bob's office.

"'Call,' says he, 'on the new machine over there. Telephone.'

"'Lemme out of here!' yells Bob. 'I can't listen to no telephone calls now. Come out and give us a hand.'

"'But it's from Harrisburg,' says the janitor. 'It's from the Governor's office. You got to go.'

"'Stay here, Bob,' says Judge Hunt. He beckons to me. 'Stay here, and I'll answer it,' he says.

"We looked at each other in a queer way when we went across the Bridge of Sighs. The courthouse clock was striking nine, and I could look down into the yard and see people hammering at the trap.

"After Judge Hunt had listened to that telephone call he had a hard time putting the receiver back on the hook.

"'I always believed in Providence, in a way,' says he, 'but I never thought it was so personal-like. Fred Joliffe is innocent. We're to call off this business,' says he, 'and wait for a messenger from the Governor. He's got the evidence of a woman . . . Anyway, we'll hear it later.'

"Now, I'm not much of a hand at describing mental states, so I can't tell you exactly what we felt then. Most of all was a fever and horror for fear they had already whisked Fred out and strung him up.

"But when we looked down into the yard from the Bridge of Sighs, we saw Ed Nabors and the carpenter arguing over a cross-cut saw on the trap itself; and the blessed morning light coming up in glory to show us we could knock that ugly thing to pieces and burn it.

"The corridor downstairs was deserted. Judge Hunt had got his wind back, and being one of those stern elocutionists who like to make complimentary remarks about God, he was going on something powerful. He sobered up when he saw that the door to Fred Joliffe's cell was open.

"'Even Joliffe,' says the Judge, 'deserves to get this news first.'

"But Fred never did get that news, unless his ghost was listening. I told you he was very small and light. His heels were a good eighteen inches off the floor as he hung by the neck from an iron peg in the wall of the cell.

"He was hanging from a noose made in a child's skipping rope—black-faced dead already, with the whites of his eyes showing in slits, and his heels swinging over a kicked-away stool.

"No, son, we didn't think it was suicide for long. For a little while we were stunned, half crazy, naturally. It was like thinking about your troubles at three o'clock in the morning.

"But, you see, Fred's hands were still tied behind him. There was a bump on the back of his head, from a hammer that lay beside the stool. Somebody had walked in there with the hammer concealed

behind his back, had stunned Fred when he wasn't looking, had run a slipknot in that skipping rope, and jerked him up a-flapping to strangle there.

"It was the creepiest part of the business, when we'd got that through our heads, and we all began loudly to tell each other where we'd been during the confusion. Nobody had noticed much and I was scared green.

"When we gathered round the table in Bob's office, Judge Hunt took hold of his nerve with both hands. He looked at Bob Moran, at Ed Nabors, at Doc Macdonald, and at me. One of us was the other hangman.

"This is a bad business, gentlemen,' says he, clearing his throat a couple of times like a nervous orator before he starts. 'What I want to know is, who under sanity would strangle a man when he thought we intended to do it anyway, on a gallows?'

"Then Doc Macdonald turned nasty. 'Well,' says he, 'if it comes to that, you might inquire where that skipping rope came from to begin with.'

"I don't get you,' says Bob Moran, bewildered-like.

"Oh, don't you?' says Doc, and sticks out his whiskers. 'Well, then, who was so dead set on this execution going through as scheduled that he wanted to

use a gun when the trap wouldn't drop?'

"Bob made a noise as though he'd been hit in the stomach. He stood looking at Doc for a minute, with his hands hanging down—and then he went for him. He had Doc back across the table, banging his head on the edge, when people began to crowd into the room at the yells. Funny, too; the first one in was the jail carpenter, who was pretty sore at not being told that the hanging had been called off.

"What do you want to start fighting for?' he says, fretful-like. He was bigger than Bob, and had him off Doc with a couple of heaves. 'Why didn't you tell me what was going on? They say there ain't going to be any hanging. Is that right?'

"Judge Hunt nodded, and the carpenter—Barney Hicks, that's who it was, I remember now—Barney Hicks looked pretty peevish, and says, 'All right, all right, but you hadn't ought to fight all over the joint like that.'

"Then he looks at Ed Nabors. 'What I want is my hammer. Where's my hammer, Ed? I been looking all over the place for it. What did you do with it?'

"Ed Nabors sits up, pours himself four fingers of rye, and swallows it.

"'Beg pardon, Barney,' says he in the coolest voice I ever heard. 'I must have left it in the cell,' he says, 'when I killed Fred Joliffe.'

"Talk about silences! It was like one of those silences when the magician at the Opera House fires a gun and six doves fly out of an empty box. I just couldn't believe it.

"But I remember Ed Nabors sitting big in the corner by the barred window, in his shiny black coat and string tie. His hands were on his knees, and he was looking from one to the other of us, smiling a little. He looked as old as the prophets then; and he'd got enough liquor to keep the nerve from twitching beside his eye.

"He just sat there, very quietly, shifting the plug of tobacco around in his cheek, and smiling.

"Judge, she says in a reflective way, 'you got a call from the Governor at Harrisburg, didn't you? Uh-huh. I knew what it would be. A woman had come forward, hadn't she, to confess Fred Joliffe was innocent and *she* had killed Randall Fraser? Uh-huh. The woman was my daughter. Jessie couldn't face telling it here, you see. That was why she ran away from me and went to the Governor. She'd have kept quiet if you

hadn't gone and convicted Fred.'

"'But why...' shouts the Judge. 'Why?'

"'It was like this,' Ed goes on in that slow way of his. 'She'd been on pretty intimate terms with Randall Fraser, Jessie had. And both Randall and Fred were having a whooping lot of fun threatening to tell the whole town about it. She was pretty near crazy, I think. And on the night of the murder Fred Joliffe was too drunk to remember anything that happened. He thought he *had* killed Randall, I suppose, when he woke up and found Randall dead and blood on his hands.

"'It's all got to come out now, I suppose,' says he, nodding. 'What did happen was that the three of 'em were in that back room, which Fred didn't remember. He and Randall had a fight while they were baiting Jessie. Fred whacked him hard enough with that mallet to lay him out, but all the blood he got was from a big splash over Randall's eye. Jessie... well, Jessie finished the job when Fred ran away, that's all.'

"'But, you damned fool,' cries Bob Moran, and begins to pound the table, 'why did you have to go and kill Fred when Jessie had confessed?'

"'You fellows wouldn't

have convicted Jessie, would you?' says Ed, blinking round at us. 'No. But if Fred had lived after her confession, you'd have *had* to, boys. That was how I figured it out. Once Fred learned what did happen, that he wasn't guilty and she was, he'd never have let up until he'd carried that case to the Superior Court out of your hands.

"He'd have screamed all over the State until they either had to hang her or send her up for life. I couldn't stand that. As I say, that was how I figured it out, although my brain's not so clear these days. So,' says he, nodding and leaning over to take aim at the cuspidor, 'when I heard about that telephone call, I went into Fred's cell and finished my job.'

"But don't you understand,' says Judge Hunt, in the way you'd reason with a lunatic, 'that Bob Moran will have to arrest you for murder, and—'

It was the peacefulness of Ed's expression that scared us then. He got up from his chair, dusted his shiny black coat, and smiled at us.

"Oh, no,' says he very clearly. 'That's what you *don't* understand. You can't do a single damned thing to me. You can't even arrest me.'

"He's bughouse,' says Bob Moran.

"Am I?' says Ed affably. 'Listen to me. I've committed what you might call a perfect murder, because I've done it legally . . . Judge, what time did you talk to the Governor's office and get the order for the execution to be called off? Be careful now.'

"And I said, with the whole idea of the business suddenly hitting me, 'It was maybe five minutes past nine, wasn't it, Judge? I remember the courthouse clock striking when we were going over the Bridge of Sighs.'

"I remember it, too,' says Ed Nabors. 'And Doc MacDonald will tell you that Fred Joliffe was dead before ever that clock struck nine. I have in my pocket,' says he, unbuttoning his coat, 'a court order which authorizes me to kill Fred Joliffe, by means of hanging by the neck—which I did—between the hours of eight and nine in the morning—which I also did. And I did it in full legal style before the order was countermanded. Well?'

"Judge Hunt took off his stovepipe hat and wiped his face with a bandana.

"You can't get away with this,' says the Judge, and grabs the Sheriff's order off the table. 'You can't trifle with the law in that way. And you can't execute sentence alone. Look

here! "In the presence of a qualified medical practitioner." What do you say to that?"

"Well, I can produce my medical diploma," says Ed, nodding again. "I may be a booze-hister, and mighty unreliable, but they haven't struck me off the register yet. . . . You lawyers are hell on the wording of the law," says he admiringly, "and it's the wording that's done for you this time. Until you get the law altered with some fancy words, there's nothing in that document to say that the doctor and the hangman can't be the same person."

"After a while Bob Moran turned round to the Judge with

a funny expression on his face. It might have been a grin.

"This ain't according to morals," says he. "A fine citizen like Fred shouldn't get murdered like that. It's awful. Something's got to be done about it. As you said yourself this morning, Judge, he ought to have the law and nothing but the law. Is Ed right, Judge?"

"Frankly, I don't know," says Judge Hunt, wiping his face again. "But so far as I know, he is. What are you doing, Robert?"

"I'm writing him out a check for fifty dollars," says Bob Moran, surprised-like. "We got to have it all nice and legal, haven't we?"



Charles B. Child

The Dwelling Place of the Proud

The compassionate little Chief Inspector of the Baghdad police, Chafik J. Chafik, faces the most baffling mystery in his long career. Strange things were happening in Kademein, the holy place, the sacred Shrine of the Shia-a, and to add immeasurably to the danger it was the eve of Muharram, the festival that was a time of mourning. One uncontrolled spark could bring out the mobs and an explosion of mass violence . . . And Inspector Chafik, that conscientious, troubled little man, asked himself: "How can I weave with broken threads?" . . .

Detective: INSPECTOR CHAFIK

CHAFIK J. CHAFIK, A policeman of Baghdad with many duties, entered his office in a well-guarded building on upper Rashid Street early in the morning of a very hot day. He complained to the uniformed sergeant who attended him with the night's reports, "Is it ordained that I must sit in dust?" and took a feather whisk from the lower drawer of a filing cabinet. When he had brushed his chair he sat with proper care for the creases that his wife had pressed into the trousers of his white linen suit. "Proceed," he said to the Sergeant.

"Sir, there are corpses—"

"A day without corpses in Baghdad will be a day when our streets are perfumed with roses."

The Sergeant, a very large man, whose bulk contracted the small office, recognized domestic symptoms. His mahogany-colored face was proofed against expression, but his tiger's eyes were sad. He made a prayer for himself and others, said, "May God will it!" in answer to the Chief Inspector's reference to roses, and went on, "About the corpse, sir—"

"So? Corpse singular? Why then bother me with corpses plural?"

"All clay robbed of souls

demands our attention," the Sergeant said severely.

Inspector Chafik stood up. He was a small man with high, bony shoulders, delicate feet and hands. His head was large for his body, his face thin, his nose long, his lips full under the ghost of a mustache. Large dun-colored eyes, flat as the land of his birth, were animated by the shadows of his thoughts. In profile he had the likeness of a Babylonian king.

He salaamed humbly to his assistant. "Forgive me, my dear Abdullah—I brought personal troubles to the office. How rightly you correct me in pointing out that all corpses once had souls!"

"We are liable to forget," Sergeant Abdullah said in a forgiving voice.

"Please continue about the singular corpse." Inspector Chafik reached for cigarettes, changed his mind, restlessly tapped the desk with his fingertips. He had nicely manicured nails and there was a signet ring set with a red intaglio on the small finger of his left hand.

"The corpse is named Hamid Babur," Sergeant Abdullah began his recitation of the facts. "Age, about sixty. Address, Mohammed-bin-Ali Street, Kademein—"

Chafik interrupted, "Holy

Kademein has been in various reports recently—an epidemic of stomach troubles probably due to over-indulgence in broken glass, scorpions, and the other delicacies they eat up here."

He was a religious man but he had an intellectual's scorn for the conjurers who infested the great shrines of his Faith. Kademein, a town four miles from Baghdad, was a glory of Islam and a policeman's nightmare; in its twisting alleyways were born the mobs that sometimes terrorized Baghdad. The Shrine was particularly sacred to the *Shia* denomination, which, for centuries, had opposed the caliphate of the orthodox *Sunni* majority. Thus the Christians, too, had shed each other's blood for dogma.

Inspector Chafik, a middle-of-the-road man, straddled the schism of his Church.

"How did Hamid Babur die?" he asked Sergeant Abdullah.

"Death, by poison, sir."

"A woman's weapon. How many wives? How many concubines?"

"Deceased had one wife and no known concubines. A cobbler by trade. No fortune except his sweat. Upright. Devout. He habitually rose at dawn to make his prayer at the Shrine—"

"Death was sudden?"

"Within the holy precincts, sir. Preliminary medical reports suggest a narcotic poison—"

"Probably a hashish addict. We all have our vices." Inspector Chafik took a cigarette from the box on his desk, tapped it on a thumbnail, frowned, and dropped it unlit into the king-size ashtray. "Recite the history of the other corpses," he said brusquely.

The Sergeant obeyed.

First, the Inspector pondered a knifing in the Alwiyah district where the body of a bedouin girl had been found ripped in the belly. She had been a brothel inmate. "Look for her father or a brother—she disgraced her family and the tribal law is strict," he said.

He was considering the case of a male corpse taken from the river, a strangler's cord around the neck, when he was interrupted by a call from the Police Chief of Kademein. "A moment, my dear *mufawwadh*," Chafik made a bow to the telephone and said to Sergeant Abdullah, "Find out if the knot was a fisherman's knot. If so, hold for interrogation Hassan Azak who moors his boat near the old Beit Malek Ali. That one moonlights odd jobs for the gangs . . . I am now at your disposal," he said into the telephone.

"My concern is the death of Hamid Babur—"

"It has been brought to my attention—"

"I would be gratified, Chief Inspector, if you would give it priority. You know we have an epidemic of sickness up here?"

"Is that unusual in a drainless jungle?"

"The one who died—a poor shoemaker—was much loved for his saintly works. And the sick are all religious men. And we are at the eve of *Muharram*—"

Somber shadows moved across the screens of Inspector Chafik's drab eyes. The festival was the opening month of the Moslem year, a time of mourning for the *Shia-a*, a time when those rigid dissenters flagellated themselves to achieve a condition of religious ecstasy. Rumor, howling like a wolfpack through the labyrinth of Kademein, could bring out the mobs.

The little man reached for a cigarette and then with an impatient gesture swept the box from the desk.

"How bad is the situation?" he asked the Chief of Police.

"We require reinforcements—"

"I come."

Sergeant Abdullah drove the car. They followed the left bank of the Tigris, passing the

Abdul Kadir palace and the burial ground of Iraq's short-lived monarchy. They crossed the river at the site of the old Bridge of Boats and went through groves of date palms and cemeteries; the bodies of the devout, brought from Persia and beyond, once by camel train, now by General Motors trucks, were a richer investment to landowners than the trees.

The streets of Kademein, unchanged from the days of Turkish domination, were attic-hot where the sun struck and cellar-cold where the sun could not reach. Houses with shuttered windows leaned on one another as they seemed to reel in drunken oblivion. An odorous place, and silent, but Chafik was not fooled.

"A policeman's knock would shake out the bedbugs of ancient hates," he said to Abdullah.

"Holy men live here, sir."

"Accept my apologies."

They came to the *midan*, the great square in front of the Shrine, and a view of the forty-foot pillars of the Rose Gate, covered with glazed tiles of pink and turquoise-blue arabesque; there were seven gates to Kademein, all but the Rose Gate were closed on the eve of the time of mourning.

A chain hung between the pillars at the level of a tall man;

it was caught up in the center and gracefully looped.

The sanctuary was encompassed by gray walls. There were many beggars—the halt, the blind, and the conjurers. Chafik noticed a crouched figure in a doorway opposite the Shrine; a pale face, a boy and a cripple, he thought, and Chafik paused to thank God for blessing him with a healthy son.

He cricked his neck as he strained to look up at the golden towers and cupolas of Kademein. The Gate, earth-level for mortals, was easier to see. He watched the worshippers pull down the chain to bless it as they entered.

"A symbol—just a symbol!" he grumbled. "Chains—prisons—martyrs!"

Sergeant Abdullah, who was of the *Shia* persuasion, ground his gears as he stopped at police headquarters.

The *mufawwadh* was an old friend, a tall thin man whose professional ulcers gave him a melancholy expression. When they had ritually greeted one another, Chafik said, "I am flattered by your request for my help, but you are as competent as me to investigate this mystery."

"The Assistant Director does not think so."

Chafik shrugged. "That little rooster has to crow twice in

order to make himself heard."

"He will crow more than twice if the death of Hamid Babur is not cleared up on a non-religious basis," the Kademein Chief of Police said grimly.

He beckoned Chafik to the window. Below was the courtyard of the Shrine, beautifully paved, the ablution tanks crystal, the doors and archways graciously proportioned and patterned. The two major domes of Kademein were golden shields turned to the blazing sky; communities of doves clustered and occasionally rose in clouds when disturbed by the chanting of the worshippers. There were four slender towers, each girdled with anachronistic strings of electric lights, which sent their nightly beams over the desert land. Once fires had blazed on these gilded minarets to guide pilgrim travelers.

Kademein was a tree taprooted in yesterday. Inspector Chafik kissed his hand in respect.

He took his friend's binoculars and examined the scene. "Who is the one in the doorway?" he asked, remembering the boy he had noticed from the police car.

Not a boy, he saw now; not even a wizened child. The head was too large, the body

somehow truncated, and the legs lost under the hem of a ragged gown such as street urchins wore—the whole squatting on a crude platform mounted on wheels. Enormous eyes were fixed on the towers and domes of Kademein.

"Yusif, son of Ahmed Fadil," the Chief of Police said. "Not so young as you might think—one detained in childhood—"

"Speechless?"

"Yes."

"But his eyes talk. How they plead! Why is he not taken into the Shrine? Sometimes in moments of ecstasy the sick become whole—no miracle!—even psychiatrists do not claim magic for their gods."

"His father forbids it. Ahmed Fadil hates God."

Inspector Chafik played with a cigarette. "No, no!" he said when his friend reached for matches. "My wife," he explained with a nervous laugh. "She is a visiting lady at the hospital and concerns herself with those who cough themselves to death. Why does Ahmed Fadil hate God?"

"Clearly, because he was given an incomplete son. He is a proud man—"

"Pride is like perfume—pleasant to inhale but revolting to swallow. The blasphemy is in his bile, not in his heart."

"May that be true," the Chief of Police said piously. He went on, "The man has had many troubles. In his youth he wished to be a doctor but failed to pass the examinations. He is employed as an attendant in the mental ward of the State Hospital. Last month his wife died. He is pockets-down with debts and furthermore has trouble with the *Qadhi*—"

Chafik raised his eyebrows. The *Qadhi* sat in judgment in the religious courts, which, among other matters coming under Koranic law, dealt with family problems. "What is Fadil's offense?" he asked.

"He neglects his son."

The little Inspector sighed. "And foolishly he thinks he can punish God?" He adjusted the binoculars to watch the worshippers as they entered the Shrine. Each man reached for the chain looped across the doorway, pulled it down with a rattle of links, pressed it to forehead and lips. A father bearing a boy of circumcisional age on his shoulders paused to permit the small one to grasp the tattered handgrips and sturdily raise himself for the ritual. A cloud of tumbler doves obscured the view and Chafik turned from the window.

"You referred to the sickness as an epidemic. Describe the symptoms."

The Chief of Police took medication for his ulcers. "Well," he said, as he put down the glass. "First, the victim becomes immobilized. In some cases the heart is affected. He collapses. Later there may be vomiting. Normally, the condition clears within twenty-four hours. According to the medical authorities there are traces of a poisonous substance in the vomit. Its nature has not yet been determined."

"But more important, what causes such an epidemic? A germ? A virus?"

"It has not been determined."

A disturbance at the Shrine drew Chafik's attention. A fanatic who shrieked, "Ali!—Hussein!—" clung to the chain and covered it with kisses. He was removed by the attendants whose duty it was to keep order within the sacred walls.

Tension thrummed like a drawn bowstring as others cried, "Ali! Hussein! Ali-Hussein! Hussein-Ali!" naming their martyrs with a frenzied mourning chant. Soon the flagellants and head slashers would begin grisly demonstrations; and madness would reign in Kademein.

Time to mourn. Time to hate. Time to transfuse the ancient schism with the fresh blood of self-inflicted wounds.

"They begin early this year."

said the Chief of Police.

"Because of the sickness?"

"Yes. There were the usual smoldering rumors and Hamid Babur's death added fuel. He was a devout man, and as I have said, the people think this evil comes from the *Sunni*—that the sickness strikes only the very devout *Shia*, those who say *Fajr* at Kademein—"

"You mean that only those who attend the early morning prayer are inflicted with the sickness?"

"Mainly so. There have been a few mild cases during the afternoon prayer, but the majority occur at the dawn hour. Hamid Babur was always of that congregation and he had previously had the sickness. This time he died—at the foot of the sepulchre of Musa-bin-Tafar. Excuse me—" The Chief of Police answered the telephone.

The little color in his face faded; the look he gave Inspector Chafik was expressive.

"It has happened. A *Sunni* knifed a *Shia* in a cafe brawl. The mobs are out. If more are taken sick at *Fajr* tomorrow we will need troops."

Chafik left his friend and joined Sergeant Abdullah who had waited with the car. The big man was watching the

crowds. "Trouble brews," the Sergeant announced.

"You croak like a bird of ill-omen."

"Trouble brews," repeated Abdullah. He pointed with his chin at the gathering mob. "There are doorways which we should sandbag for machine-gun posts—"

"There is a doorway with a fine view of the Gate and at present it is occupied by a cripple—"

"Previously noted and under surveillance, sir."

"Oh, most perfect of policemen! Your light runs before you!" Inspector Chafik at once apologized for his testiness. "If only I could smoke I would not be so fretful," he confessed, and gave the crumpled cigarette to a whining beggar.

It was before the hour of *Zuhr*; the open place fronting the Shrine would soon fill for the afternoon prayer. Chafik went to the doorway where the son of Ahmed Fadil crouched, small and frail and lonely. The hands, used to propel the wheeled platform, were callused; the legs under his gown were withered.

Unblinking pain-racked eyes were fixed on Kademein. Yusuf paid no attention when the Inspector spoke to him.

"Don't waste your time. He neither hears nor speaks," said a

bitter voice at Chafik's elbow.

The man was tall and thin. A Pharaoh's mummy out of its wrappings, Chafik thought, and the description was apt; the man had the hawk nose and long skull of a yesterday's Egyptian, the same delicate hands and feet, the same high cheekbones and sensuous lips. And the same pride. He looked down at the Inspector as a god at a mortal.

Chafik noted the cleanliness of the white linen trousers and shortsleeved tunic and recognized the uniform of a hospital worker. "You are Ahmed Fadil?"

"Does it concern you?"

"I am concerned when a father neglects his son."

"You call *that* a son?" The man pointed to the cripple in the doorway. He shrugged with contempt as he uncovered a small basket, took out a bowl of scraps, a round of unleavened bread, a crock of soured milk, and put them within reach of the silent youth. Thus food was given to a kenneled dog. "I do my duty," the man said in his bitter voice. He picked up the basket.

"God asks more than duty—He asks you to give your son love."

It stopped Ahmed Fadil as he turned to go. His chin jerked up and he declared in a voice

harsh with anger, "There is no God!"

He spat in the direction of the golden domes of Kademein.

Sergeant Abdullah, who loomed behind the Inspector, took a step forward, his hand hovering near the worn leather of his holstered gun. A glance from Chafik stopped him.

"If there is no God, why do you hate That which does not exist?" Chafik asked softly.

"I hate all those who mouth prayers to a myth, who degrade their bodies by flagellation."

"But some men, Mr. Fadil, scourge themselves mentally. Do you? Because of him?" Chafik pointed at the mute in the doorway.

The man looked at his son for the first time. There was a moment when his face softened; then he turned his back and said savagely, "That is what your God gave me! Surely there will be a reckoning!"

"There is a time of reckoning for all of us."

Ahmed Fadil's eyes blazed. "The time has come for *them*!" he said, pointing to the great gate of the Shrine where the devout were gathered for prayer. "They corrupt even this husk of a thing you call my son! Look at him—how he longs to be with them! I forbid it! Look at him—look—"

Yusif's small body was rigid,

but his lips moved soundlessly, shaping the words in unison with the chanting of the worshippers.

The father spat in disgust and went away with long strides.

"Let him go," Chafik told Sergeant Abdullah. "Pride and hatred blind him. Poor fool—one day his eyes will open—"

Inspector Chafik sat in his small office which overlooked the busy thoroughfare of Rashid Street. He had been sitting there since his return from Kademein, and the pile of crushed and unsmoked cigarettes in his ashtray was evidence of wrestling with a priority problem. Subordinates who brought routine problems were treated to a blank look and extraneous snatches of conversation.

He said in a sleepwalker's voice to an officer reporting a confession from the father of the bedouin girl found with slit belly: "But how was it administered to so many?" And to another who came to confirm that Hassan the Fisherman had indeed knotted the cord about the neck of the man found in the river: "How can I weave with broken threads?"

When Sergeant Abdullah arrived with the autopsy report on Hamid Babur, the Inspector

was quoting the 29th verse of the 16th chapter of the Koran, "...evil is the dwelling place of the proud." The understanding Sergeant crisply interrupted, "Permit me, sir, to advise you that you talk to yourself," and tapped the report for attention.

Chafik shuddered like a man coming out of a nightmare. "Ah, that habit—can I never break it?" He was in the act of lighting a cigarette when he remembered the promise to his wife and said glumly, "Now I have two habits to plague me." He studied the report.

Hamid Babur had an organic heart condition and it had killed him. But there were also traces of the powerful drug found in the vomit of the more fortunate victims of the Kademein sickness. Analysis mentioned "curare," and the Inspector called the police laboratory.

"Oh, Father of Intestines!" he said to the pathologist in charge. "Enlighten me about this drug you found within the corpse I sent you. It was my understanding that curare is used by South American natives to poison their arrows—"

"In a crude form, yes, Inspector. It causes immobilization of the animal struck by the arrow. Then the creature's throat can be cut at leisure—"

"But I understood—" "—that the scratch would kill, Father of Ignorance?" The medical man laughed merrily. "You have been reading detective stories. Hamid Babur would not have died if it had not been for his heart condition."

"Does the drug work if taken orally?" asked Chafik.

"It might cause vomiting, but not seriously. If, however, there was a cut on the mouth—an abrasion—"

"And the condition of the mouth of Hamid Babur?"

Papers rustled. Then the pathologist said, "There was a jagged cut on the lower lip—"

Inspector Chafik reached for a cigarette, then angrily discarded it. "Tell me," he rasped. "Tell me, Father of Hearts and Livers, did those who did *not* die of the Kademein sickness also have abrasions near their mouths?"

"I must look. I have the reports of the Health Officer."

The small policeman cradled the telephone under his chin; his hands wove spider's webs as he waited. When the doctor came back he greeted him harshly, "Well?"

"Examinations made by the Health Officer of the more serious cases do include mouth sores—"

"So!" The Inspector chose and toyed with another ciga-

rette and then asked in a deceptively gentle voice, "My dear Doctor, about this curare thing and my ignorance—what is it in substance?"

"Well, it is defined as coming from a loganiaceous vine or tree—a resinous extract, dark brown in color—an aromatic, tarry odor—um—not unpleasant—"

"Used medically?"

"Beneficially so. We use it in conjunction with shock treatment to bring patients out of deep depression. Curare keeps them from hurting themselves. These mental cases require—"

Chafik slammed down the telephone and rose tiptoe, balanced on the balls of his feet to give himself stature. His thin sharp face was a mask cast in bronze newly drawn from the furnace. Shadows swirled in the flat drab eyes; so kite-hawks gather in the desert sky above a kill.

"Tomorrow we say *Fajr* at the Shrine of Kademein," he said to Sergeant Abdullah.

And added, "Petition God for a miracle . . ."

The stars were still the bright eyes of the night when Inspector Chafik rose from beside his sleeping wife. He appreciated her as he dressed; they had been twenty years married, and her dark hair

spread over the pillow brought to his mind words of an old love song, "Your ringlets are daggers in my heart." He went to look at his son.

Faisal had ten years. Perhaps more. He was an elfin-eared boy born without name in the labyrinth of the Baghdad bazaars where the Homeless Ones ran. Chafik had chosen Faisal, and Leila, his wife, had given him rebirth.

They were very happy with their adopted son.

The Inspector removed the plastic machine gun that the boy cuddled, replaced it with the schoolbooks that had fallen from the bed, kissed Faisal lightly, and went away.

Sergeant Abdullah was waiting outside. They drove from the Street of the Scatterer of Blessings, where Chafik lived, to Kademein. They passed through a city that slept uneasily; it was already tomorrow and *Muharram*, but too early for religious fervor to mount the mobs.

The police car crossed the Tigris into the area of date palms and tombs. Pre-dawn silence cloaked the land and Inspector Chafik shivered as he toyed with the new inevitable unlit cigarette. "The cold is in my soul," he said to the solicitous Sergeant.

"Prayer will warm you, sir."

"I overflow with prayer—al-

so I ooze fear—my body has the odor of a freshly killed chicken."

The diadems on the towers of Kademein had scattered the stars when Chafik halted the car. They went on foot through the winding sewers of the streets into the freshness of the *midan*. At this hour the Shrine was black-walled and the Rose Gate a splash of ebony.

Aloft, where the dawn now challenged the night, a lark prematurely greeted the day.

"The Crier, fortunately, still sleeps," said Inspector Chafik as he looked up at the muezzin's tower.

Unsleeping was the son of Ahmed Fadil. Yusif was crouched in the doorway, hunched in his rags, the pale oval of his face turned to the sky. Sergeant Abdullah raised him with a scoop of bear's paws and lowered him to the Inspector's shoulders, crotch hooked about Chafik's neck, the withered legs tucked under his armpits.

He was as light to carry as a confessed sin.

The Inspector walked with Yusif across the open place to the Gate of the Shrine.

A yawning Crier adjusted the microphone on the east tower of Kademein as the lark's song soared to meet the rising sun. The call to prayer, a sobbing chant, went out over the

sleeping city, its faith a song to God.

"Allah-u Akbar!"

Four times repeated.

A many padding of feet as those under the Call ran to the Gate. There they were halted by lines of police who rose from lurking places.

"Ash-hadu al-la-ildha ill-Al-lah!"

As the Voice pronounced the creed, Chafik approached the doorway. There was now light in the land and he could see the dangling chain. His frail burden raised himself and reached for the loop.

"Hayya 'alas-salah!"

The appeal to come to prayer was sung with all the emotion of faith. Then, suddenly, the mute on Chafik's shoulders echoed it. Sound burst from a throat too long silent. Harsh, yet singing. And ended in the wail of a disappointed child as Chafik stopped short of the Gate.

Extended hands. Pleading eyes.

"God the Merciful! God the Loving-Kind!" prayed Inspector Chafik, shaken with wonder.

He had directed the police to permit one man to pass the barrier and now he came, tall, thin, crying without pride: "No!—no!—do not let him touch it!"

Ahmed Fadil dropped to his

knees between the Gate of Kademein and the man who carried his son.

"Is there then a barrier between Yusif and his God?" asked Chafik.

"The chain—"

"Chains are made to break or to bless if they have been worn by martyrs." The Inspector spoke with calculated impatience and moved forward, wishing he could move back.

The man rose and barred the way. He looked, not at Chafik, but eye-level with the Inspector's burden.

Yusif did not see his father, but reached for the chain, as a child reaches for the unknown world beyond the cradle.

Ahmed Fadil struck down his son's hands, shouting, "It is poisoned!"

He tore off his neckcloth and wiped the links. "See?" he cried. The cloth was soiled with a brownish substance sweet with the odor of honey.

There was blood on his hand.

"So you also roughened the links to cut the mouths of the devout before you applied the curare?" said Inspector Chafik.

"Yes—"

"You stole the extract from the mental ward, came at night, put the curare on the chain?"

"Yes, yes."

"You planned an epidemic

for Kademein to incite the mobs, to put man against man, sect against sect?"

"But I did not intend a man should die—"

"You did all this because you have been given an incomplete son? Because you hated God?"

"Yes—yes."

"You confess?" Inspector Chafik asked the question as a policeman concerned only with secular law. In this moment he towered, dominated the Gate of Kademein. Then he said in a humble voice, "May I be

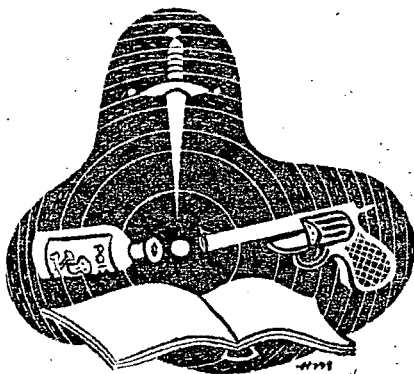
forgiven. Your crime is against God, and in His Court you will find justice."

He signaled Sergeant Abdullah to remove Ahmed Fadil. And sensitive to the voices of the worshippers, he heard the calm as they streamed to the Gate, answering the call to prayer.

"La ildha ill-Allah!"

"Do you hear?" Chafik asked the burden that he now bore lightly on his shoulders.

The Inspector kicked off his shoes and walked into the promise of the Shrine.



Damon Runyon

The Old Doll's House

Damon Runyon wrote his own editorial introduction to "The Old Doll's House"—to wit: "A very romantic story—so romantic that some very romantic people, indeed, are still scratching their noodles over it. They will never get anywhere. Miss Abigail Ardsley has plenty of potatoes. And she is not the sort to talk" . . .

NOW IT SEEMS THAT ONE cold winter night, a party of residents of Brooklyn comes across the Manhattan Bridge in an automobile wishing to pay a call on a guy by the name of Lance McGowan, who is well-known to one and all along Broadway as a coming guy in the business world.

In fact, it is generally conceded that, barring accident, Lance will some day be one of the biggest guys in this country as an importer, and especially as an importer of such merchandise as fine liquors, because he is very bright, and has many good connections throughout the United States and Canada.

Furthermore, Lance McGowan is a nice-looking young guy and he has plenty of ticker, although some citizens say he does not show very sound business judgment in trying to move in on Angie the Ox over

in Brooklyn, as Angie the Ox is an importer himself, besides enjoying a splendid trade in other lines, including artichokes and extortion.

Of course Lance McGowan is not interested in artichokes at all, and very little in extortion, but he does not see any reason why he shall not place his imports in a thriving territory such as Brooklyn, especially as his line of merchandise is much superior to anything handled by Angie the Ox.

Anyway, Angie is one of the residents of Brooklyn in the party that wishes to call on Lance McGowan, and besides Angie the party includes a guy by the name of Mockie Max, who is a very prominent character in Brooklyn, and another guy by the name of The Louse Kid, who is not so prominent, but who is considered a very promising young guy

in many respects, although personally I think The Louse Kid has a very weak face.

He is supposed to be a wonderful hand with a burlap bag when anybody wishes to put somebody in such a bag, which is considered a great practical joke in Brooklyn, and in fact The Louse Kid has a burlap bag with him on the night in question, and they are figuring on putting Lance McGowan in the bag when they call on him, just for a laugh. Personally, I consider this a very crude form of humor, but then Angie the Ox and the other members of his party are very crude characters, anyway.

Well, it seems they have Lance McGowan pretty well cased, and they know that of an evening along toward 10 o'clock, he nearly always strolls through West Fifty-fourth Street on his way to a certain spot on Park Avenue that is called the Humming Bird Club, which has a very hightoned clientele, and the reason Lance goes there is because he has a piece of the joint, and furthermore he loves to show off his shape in a tuxedo to the swell dolls.

So these residents of Brooklyn drive in their automobile along this route, and as they roll past Lance McGowan, Angie the Ox and Mockie Max

let fly at Lance with a couple of sawed-offs, while The Louse Kid holds the burlap bag, figuring for all I know that Lance will be startled by the sawed-offs and will hop into the bag like a rabbit.

But Lance is by no means a sucker, and when the first blast of slugs from the sawed-offs breezes past him without hitting him, what does he do but hop over a brick wall alongside him and drop into a yard on the other side. So Angie the Ox, and Mockie Max and The Louse Kid get out of their automobile and run up close to the wall themselves because they commence figuring that if Lance McGowan starts popping at them from behind this wall, they will be taking plenty the worst of it, for of course they cannot figure Lance to be strolling about without being rodged up somewhat.

But Lance is by no means rodged up, because a rod is apt to create a bump in his shape when he has his tuxedo on, so the story really begins with Lance McGowan behind the brick wall, practically defenseless, and the reason I know this story is because Lance McGowan tells most of it to me, as Lance knows that I know his real name is Lancelot, and he feels under great obligation to

me because I never mention the matter publicly.

Now, the brick wall Lance hops over is a wall around a pretty fair-sized yard, and the yard belongs to an old two-story stone house, and this house is well known to one and all in this man's town as a house of great mystery, and it is pointed out as such by the drivers of sightseeing buses.

This house belongs to an old doll by the name of Miss Abigail Ardsley, and anybody who ever reads the newspapers will tell you that Miss Abigail Ardsley has so many potatoes that it is really painful to think of, especially to people who have no potatoes whatever. In fact, Miss Abigail Ardsley has practically all the potatoes in the world, except maybe a few left over for general circulation.

These potatoes are left to her by her papa, old Waldo Ardsley, who accumulates same in the early days of this town by buying corner real estate very cheap before people realize this real estate will be quite valuable later on for fruit-juice stands and cigar stores.

It seems that Waldo is a most eccentric old bloke, and is very strict with his daughter, and will never let her marry, or even as much as look as if she wishes to marry, until finally she is so old she does not care a cuss

about marrying, or anything else, and becomes eccentric herself.

In fact, Miss Abigail Ardsley becomes so eccentric that she cuts herself off from everybody, and especially from a lot of relatives who are wishing to live off of her, and any time anybody cuts themselves off from such characters, they are considered very eccentric, indeed, especially by the relatives. She lives in the big house all alone, except for a couple of old servants, and it is very seldom that anybody sees her around and about.

Well, no sooner is he in the yard than Lance McGowan begins looking for a way to get out, and one way he does not wish to get out is over the wall again, because he figures Angie the Ox and his sawed-offs are bound to be waiting for him in Fifty-fourth Street. So Lance looks around to see if there is some way out of the yard in another direction, but it seems there is no such way, and pretty soon he sees the snuzzle of a sawed-off come poking over the wall, with the ugly kisser of Angie the Ox behind it, looking for him.

Then Lance happens to try a door on one side of the house, and the door opens at once and Lance McGowan hastens in to find himself in the living-room

of the house. It is a very large living-room with very nice furniture standing around and about, and oil paintings on the walls, and a big old grandfather's clock as high as the ceiling, and statuary here and there. In fact, it is such a nice, comfortable-looking room that Lance McGowan is greatly surprised, as he is expecting to find a regular mystery-house room such as you see in the movies, with cobwebs here and there, and everything all rotted up.

But the only person in this room seems to be a little old doll all dressed in soft white, who is sitting in a low rocking chair by an open fireplace in which a bright fire is going, doing some tatting.

Well, naturally Lance McGowan is somewhat startled by this scene, and he is figuring that the best thing he can do is to guzzle the old doll before she can commence yelling for the gendarmes, when she looks up at him and gives him a soft smile, and speaks to him in a soft voice, as follows:

"Good evening," the old doll says.

Well, Lance cannot think of any reply to make to this at once, as it is certainly not a good evening for him, and he stands there looking at the old doll, somewhat dazed, when she

smiles again and tells him to sit down.

So the next thing Lance knows, he is sitting there in a chair in front of the fireplace chewing the fat with the old doll as pleasant as you please, and of course the old doll is nobody but Miss Abigail Ardsley. Furthermore, she does not seem at all alarmed, or even much surprised at seeing Lance in her house.

Of course Lance knows who Miss Abigail Ardsley is, because he often reads stories in the newspapers about her the same as everybody else, and he always figures such a character must be slightly daffy to cut herself off from everybody when she has all the potatoes in the world, and there is so much fun going on, but he is very courteous to her, because after all he is a guest in her home.

"You are young," the old doll says to Lance McGowan, looking him in the kisser. "It is many years since a young man comes through yonder door."

And with this she lets out a big sigh, and looks so very sad that Lance McGowan's heart is touched.

"Forty-five years now," the old doll says in a low voice, as if she is talking to herself. "So young, so handsome, and so good."

And although Lance is in no

mood to listen to reminiscences at this time, the next thing he knows he is hearing a very pathetic love story, because it seems that Miss Abigail Ardsley is once all hotted up over a young guy who is a clerk in her papa's office.

It seems from what Lance McGowan gathers that there is nothing wrong with the young guy that a million bobs will not cure, but Miss Abigail Ardsley's papa is a mean old waffle, and he will never listen to her having any truck with a poor guy.

But it seems that Miss Abigail Ardsley's ever-loving young guy has plenty of moxie, and every night he comes to see her after her papa goes to the hay, and she lets him in through the same side door Lance McGowan comes through, and they sit by the fire and hold hands, and talk in low tones, and plan what they will do when the young guy makes a scratch.

Then one night it seems Miss Abigail Ardsley's papa has the stomach ache, or some such, and cannot sleep a wink, so he comes wandering downstairs looking for the Jamaica ginger, and catches Miss Abigail Ardsley and her ever-loving guy in a clutch that will win the title for any wrestler that can ever learn it.

Well, this scene is so repulsive to Miss Abigail Ardsley's papa that he is practically speechless for a minute, and then he orders the young guy out of his life in every respect, and tells him never to darken his door again, especially the side door.

But it seems that by this time a great storm is raging outside, and Miss Abigail Ardsley begs and pleads with her papa to let the young guy at least remain until the storm subsides, but between being all sore up at the clutching scene he witnesses, and his stomach ache, Mr. Ardsley is very hard-hearted, indeed, and he makes the young guy take the wind.

The next morning the poor young guy is found at the side door frozen as stiff as a board, because it seems that the storm that is raging is the blizzard of 1888, which is a very famous event in the history of New York, although up to this time Lance McGowan never hears of it before, and does not believe it until he looks the matter up afterwards. It seems from what Miss Abigail Ardsley says that as near as anyone can make out, the young guy must return to the door seeking shelter after wandering about in the storm a while, but of course by this time her papa has the door all

colted up, and nobody hears the young guy.

"And," Miss Abigail Ardsley says to Lance McGowan, after giving him all these details, "I never speak to my papa again as long as he lives, and no other man ever comes in or out of yonder door, or any other door of this house, until your appearance tonight, although," she says, "this side door is never locked in case such a young man comes seeking shelter."

Then she looks at Lance McGowan in such a way that he wonders if Miss Abigail Ardsley hears the sawed-off going when Angie the Ox and Mockie Max are tossing slugs at him.

Well, all these old-time memories seem to make Miss Abigail Ardsley feel very tough, and by and by she starts to weep, and if there is one thing Lance McGowan cannot stand, it is a doll weeping, even if she is nothing but an old doll. So he starts in to cheer Miss Abigail Ardsley up, and he pats her on the arm, and says to her like this:

"Why," Lance says, "I am greatly surprised to hear your statement about the doors around here being so little used. Why, sweetheart," Lance says, "if I know there is a doll as good-looking as you in the neighborhood, and a door unlocked, I will be busting in

myself every night. Come, come, come," Lance says, "let us talk things over and maybe have a few laughs, because I may have to stick around here a while. Listen, Sweetheart," he says, "do you happen to have a drink in the joint?"

Well, at this Miss Abigail Ardsley dries her eyes, and smiles again, and then she pulls a sort of a rope near her, and in comes a guy who seems about ninety years old, and who seems greatly surprised to see Lance there. In fact, he is so surprised that he is practically tottering when he leaves the room after hearing Miss Abigail Ardsley tell him to bring some wine and sandwiches.

Well, Lance sits there with Miss Abigail Ardsley sipping wine and eating sandwiches, and all the time he is telling her stories of one kind and another, some of which he cleans up a little when he figures they may be a little too snappy for her, and by and by he has her laughing quite heartily indeed.

Finally he figures there is no chance of Angie and his sawed-offs being outside waiting for him, so he says he guesses he will be going, and Miss Abigail Ardsley personally sees him to the door, and this time it is the front door, and as Lance is leaving he thinks of something he once sees a guy

do on the stage, and he takes Miss Abigail Ardsley's hand and raises it to his lips and gives it a large kiss, all of which is very surprising to Miss Abigail Ardsley, but more so to Lance McGowan when he gets to thinking about it afterwards.

Just as he figures, there is no one in sight when he gets out in the street, so he goes on over to the Humming Bird Club, where he learns that many citizens are greatly disturbed by his absence, and are wondering if he is in The Louse Kid's burlap bag, for by this time it is pretty well known that Angie the Ox and his fellow citizens of Brooklyn are around and about.

In fact, somebody tells Lance that Angie is at the moment over in Good Time Charley's little speak in West Forty-ninth Street, buying drinks for one and all, and telling how he makes Lance McGowan hop a brick wall, which of course sounds most disparaging of Lance.

Well, while Angie is still buying these drinks, and still speaking of making Lance a brick-wall hopper, all of a sudden the door of Good Time Charley's speak opens and in comes a guy with a Betsy in his hand and this guy throws four slugs into Angie the Ox before anybody can say hello.

Furthermore, the guy throws

one slug into Mockie Max, and one slug into The Louse Kid, who are still with Angie the Ox, so the next thing anybody knows there is Angie as dead as a doornail, and there is Mockie Max even deader than Angie, and there is The Louse making a terrible fuss over a slug in his leg, and nobody can remember what the guy who plugs them looks like, except a couple of stool pigeons who state that the guy looks very much like Lance McGowan.

So what happens but early the next morning, Johnny Brannigan, the plainclothes copper, puts the arm on Lance McGowan for plugging Angie the Ox, and Mockie Max and The Louse Kid.

So the collar of Lance McGowan is water on the wheel of one and all because Lance is so prominent, and anybody will tell you that it looks as if it is a sure thing that Lance will be very severely punished, and maybe sent to the electric chair, although he hires Judge Goldstein, who is one of the surest-footed lawyers in this town, to defend him. But even Judge Goldstein admits that Lance is in a tough spot, especially as the newspapers are demanding justice, and printing long stories about Lance, and pictures of him, and calling him some very uncouth names.

Finally Lance himself commences to worry about his predicament, although up to this time a little thing like being charged with murder in the first degree never bothers Lance very much. And in fact he will not be bothering very much about this particular charge if he does not find the D. A. very fussy about letting him out on bail. In fact, it is nearly two weeks before he lets Lance out on bail, and all this time Lance is in the sneezer.

Well, by the time Lance's trial comes up, you can get 3 to 1 anywhere that he will be convicted, and the price goes up to 5 when the prosecution gets through with its case, and proves by the stool pigeons that at exactly twelve o'clock on the night of January 5th, Lance McGowan steps into Good Time Charley's little speak and plugs Angie the Ox, Mockie Max, and The Louse Kid.

Furthermore, several other witnesses who claim they know Lance McGowan by sight testify that they see Lance in the neighborhood of Good Time Charley's around twelve o'clock, so by the time it comes Judge Goldstein's turn to put on the defense, many citizens are saying that if he can do no more than beat the chair for Lance he will be doing a wonderful job.

Well, it is late in the afternoon when Judge Goldstein gets up and looks all around the courtroom, and without making any opening statement to the jury for the defense, as these mouthpieces usually do, he says like this:

"Call Miss Abigail Ardsley," he says.

At first nobody quite realizes just who Judge Goldstein is calling for, although the name sounds familiar to one and all present who read the newspapers, when in comes a little old doll in a black silk dress that almost reaches the floor, and a black bonnet.

Afterwards I read in one of the newspapers that she looks like she steps down out of an old-fashioned ivory miniature and that she is practically beautiful.

Anyway, she comes into the courtroom surrounded by so many old guys you will think it must be recess at the Old Men's Home, except they are all dressed up in clawhammer coats, and high collars, and afterwards it turns out that they are the biggest lawyers in this town, and they all represent Miss Abigail Ardsley one way or another, and they are present to see that her interests are protected.

Nobody ever sees so much bowing and scraping before in a

courtroom. In fact, even the judge bows, and although I am only a spectator I find myself bowing, too, because the way I look at it, anybody with as many potatoes as Miss Abigail Ardsley is entitled to a general bowing. When she takes the witness stand, her lawyers grab chairs and move up as close to her as possible, and in the street outside there is practically a riot as word goes around that Miss Abigail Ardsley is in the court, and citizens come running from every which way, hoping to get a peek at the richest old doll in the world.

Well, when all hands finally get settled down a little, Judge Goldstein speaks to Miss Abigail Ardsley as follows:

"Miss Ardsley," he says, "I am going to ask you just two or three questions. Kindly look at this defendant," Judge Goldstein says, pointing at Lance McGowan, and giving Lance the office to stand up. "Do you recognize him?"

Well, the little old doll takes a gander at Lance, and nods her head yes, and Lance gives her a large smile.

"Is he a caller in your home on the night of January fifth?" Judge Goldstein asks.

"He is," Miss Abigail Ardsley says.

"Is there a clock in the living-room in which you

receive this defendant?" Judge Goldstein says.

"There is," Miss Abigail Ardsley says. "A large clock," she says. "A grandfather's clock."

"Do you happen to notice," Judge Goldstein says, "and do you now recall the hour indicated by this clock when the defendant leaves your home?"

"Yes," Miss Abigail Ardsley says, "I do happen to notice. It is just twelve o'clock by my clock," she says.

Well, this statement creates a large sensation in the courtroom, because if it is twelve o'clock when Lance McGowan leaves Miss Abigail Ardsley's house in West Fifty-fourth Street, anybody can see that there is no way he can be in Good Time Charley's little speak over five blocks away at the same minute unless he is a magician, and the judge begins peeking over his specs at the coppers in the courtroom very severe, and the cops begin scowling at the stool pigeons, and I am willing to lay plenty of 6 to 5 that the stools will wish they are never born before they hear the last of this matter from the gendarmes.

Furthermore, the guys from the D.A.'s office who are handling the prosecution are looking much embarrassed, and the jurors are muttering to each

other, and right away Judge Goldstein says he moves that the case against his client be dismissed, and the judge says he is in favor of the motion.

So there is Lance as free as anybody, and as he starts to leave the courtroom he stops by Miss Abigail Ardsley, who is still sitting in the witness chair surrounded by her mouth-pieces, and he shakes her hand and thanks her, and Miss Abigail Ardsley says to Lance in a low voice, like this:

"I will be expecting you again some night, young man," she says.

"Some night, Sweetheart," Lance says, "at twelve o'clock."

And then he goes on about

his business, and Miss Abigail Ardsley goes on about hers, and everybody says it is certainly a wonderful thing that a doll as rich as Miss Abigail Ardsley comes forward in the interests of justice to save a guy like Lance McGowan from a wrong rap.

But of course it is just as well for Lance that Miss Abigail Ardsley does not explain to the court that when she recovers from the shock of the finding of her ever-loving young guy frozen to death, she stops all the clocks in her house at the hour she sees him last, so for forty-five years it is always twelve o'clock in the old doll's house.



Victor Canning

Young Man on a Bicycle

The late Anthony Boucher once wrote of this short novel that it was as "wholly delightful a crime story as I have ever read since—I am tempted to say, since the youth of Simon Templar [the Saint], if not that of Arsene Lupin. French-English Paul Langley Ashcroft is a young rogue in the grand manner; and his intricate misadventures on the Riviera had me happily chortling aloud."

Yes, captivating, rollicking, charming are the words for this short novel, complete in this anthology—a crime story about a young man who felt that the world was his oyster, that it owed him a living in the grand style (to which he was not always accustomed), a young man who had a most curious philosophy of economics—he was a victim (there is no other word for it) of philanthropy ...

Criminal: PAUL LANGLEY ASHCROFT

THE YOUNG MAN ON the bicycle was very happy. Life was good and the day was fine. The sky above the blue Mediterranean was cloudless, the heat from the sun was making the seed pods of the broom on the red cliffs crack and pop, and away ahead of him on the coast road he could just make out the white sprawl of villas that rose from the harbor of the town where he meant to spend the night.

Yes, today life was good.

Tomorrow? Well, if by tomorrow the last of his few francs had been spent on dinner and a night's lodging, he, Paul Langley Ashcroft, had no doubt that something would turn up.

Paul was a pleasant-looking young man, with an engaging face that creased naturally into a smile, the kind of face that invited confidences and inspired trust, and he was well aware that it was his most valuable asset ... that and a ready tongue. He wore a straw boater,

cocked Chevalier-fashion, a neat gray suit, and a bow tie as bright as a tropical butterfly.

Strapped to the carrier of his bicycle was a large suitcase and various oddly shaped parcels, while along the crossbar were tied an umbrella and a silver-headed walking stick. From the handle bars dangled two straw-covered flasks of wine. The bicycle and the parcels were all rather dusty, but Paul himself looked bright and fresh. Dust found it hard to settle on him.

As he rode he whistled, and now and again he made little swerving motions across the road as though he needed the extra exercise to release his exuberant energy. The tune Paul whistled was *The World Owes Me a Living*. This was his philosophy—and it was surprising how easy he found it to make the world pay up.

His methods, of course, were questionable—but the money came. He used what he wanted for himself—and then gave the rest away to those to whom the world also owed a living, but who hadn't got the same grasp of economics as himself. And when the money was all gone, he took to his bicycle and moved on to fresh enterprises, as he was doing now.

The road began to dip downhill toward a little cove,

its white strip of sand fringed by tall red-trunked pines. Paul put his feet on the handle bars and coasted. Halfway down the hill and facing the sea was a large villa, a great pink and white wedding cake of a place, hedged around with black and gold ornamental railings, cut into cool, cypress-studded terraces, towers, balconies, tiled loggias, and, out of sight at the moment, no doubt a private beach. The whole thing was an expensive monument to bad taste. Paul regarded it lovingly. He had long ago decided that if you were interested in money you had to shut your eyes to bad taste.

The main gates fronting the road had stone columns stuck all over with lozenge-shaped tiles and were surrounded by two figures of bearded seagods holding forked spears and sitting uncomfortably on curled fishtails. Picked out in golden letters across the ornamental gateway were the words *Villa Triton*.

To one side of the gate was a large wooden notice board. Paul put his feet down and braked gently to a stop. Resting his feet on the ground he read the notice and the whistling died from him. For a moment his face was quite solemn, then the sparkle gleamed in his eyes again and slowly the whistle

came back—a fat, rich contented whistle.

The board announced that the villa was To Let, Furnished. The agents had their offices in the town on the far side of the bay.

The bicycle rolled on down the hill. Two hundred yards beyond the villa a little wood of pines and tall heather ran up the hillside. Paul dismounted and, with a quick look up and down the road, pushed his bicycle into the trees. He found a sheltered dip and began to unpack his suitcase.

The first thing he took out was a square of mirror with a loop of string round it. He hung this on a pine branch and studied his face carefully in it, running one hand over his fair hair as he did so. It was a good face, honest, healthy, and, when he wished, capable of a hint of gentle melancholy which wealthy, middle-aged women found irresistible—to their cost.

But for the time being, he decided, it was a face which had to be hidden. He began to unpack the rest of his things from his suitcase and unshipped the silver-headed cane from the bicycle crossbar. And as he worked he whistled, but it was now the low absent whistle of a man who is thinking and planning hard.

When the gate bell rang Mme. Fouret was taking her siesta on the chaise longue in the housekeeper's room, a pleasant, cool room that overlooked a small side garden where a fountain splashed musically into a great alabaster bowl. She frowned and let it ring twice in the hope that the caller would go away. The gardener was out for the afternoon and she had no desire to answer the gate herself.

The bell went on ringing and reluctantly she stood up. She was a tall angular woman with a pale white face and tight-drawn black hair. She had the eye of an eagle, the mouth of a slave driver, and a heart that pulsed with romantic yearnings the moment she came into contact with any man over forty-five. Dressed in black, her keys swinging at her waist, she went through the house and out into the heat-struck garden like a tall harpy ready to hurl the bolts of her fury at any frivolous intruder.

Within five minutes her heart was captive and pulsing pleasantly. Standing at the gate was an elderly monsieur of the most dignified appearance. He wore a beard and a little waxed mustache. A pair of friendly blue eyes twinkled at her. His voice was cultured and deliberate as he half bowed and said,

"Madame, *chere madame*, a thousand apologies for disturbing you at this uncivilized hour of the afternoon. But my good friend M. Reynaud—" for a moment the silver head of his cane was tipped toward the agent's name on the notice board—"insisted that I come immediately—but immediately."

He looked up at the villa. "What a charming place, a pearl . . . It is for something like this that I have been looking ever since my dear wife died." Just for a second the blue eyes under the bushy eyebrows were on Mme. Fouret, warm and understanding and with a hint of melancholy in them.

"You wish to look over the villa, monsieur?"

"M. Durobat, madame." The bow this time was a little stiffer, more formal and very impressive, and Mme. Fouret was noticing the little button of the *Chevalier de la Legion d'honneur* in the lapel of the well-cut silk suit, the pearl pin in the black stock at his throat, the spats and the well-brushed velour hat. An industrialist, retired, she wondered . . . ? Maybe a wealthy professor, a savant . . . ?

But no matter what, a man of presence. His accent was not Parisian. There was a trace of something that she could not

place in it. Maybe a retired colonial administrator? But whatever he was she became putty in his hands.

She escorted him into the villa, showed him around, stood by while he admired pictures and porcelain, and she silently commended him for paying as much attention to the conveniences of bathrooms and kitchens as he did to works of art. When they had exhausted the villa she took him around the gardens. Where the terrace steps were steep he gallantly offered her his arm and for a while she almost forgot that she was merely the housekeeper of the Comte d'Auxier.

Before he went she made a tisane for him and they drank it by the fountain outside her room, talking together easily, as though they had long been friends. By the time M. Durobat left the villa he knew a great deal about its owner, Comte d'Auxier, and about Mme. Fouret. The Comte d'Auxier was in Paris and due to leave for America in a few days. And Mme. Fouret, he learned, had only been housekeeper in the villa for the last four years.

M. Durobat refused to let Mme. Fouret come with him to the gate. "You have already exhausted yourself too much on my behalf, *chere madame*." He leaned forward, took her

hand and kissed it. "*Au revoir.*"

M. Dürobat walked down the hill toward the cove and he was careful to be well out of sight of the villa before he entered the little wood and returned to his bicycle.

Two hours later Paul Ashcroft, suitcase in hand, walked up the wide steps of the Hotel Argenta and booked a room for the night. By going without dinner he reckoned that he would have just enough money to start operating.

At seven o'clock he put a call through to Paris from his room. He lay on his bed while he waited for it to come through, and he was relaxed and happy and whistling gently to himself.

A gruff voice at the other end of the line said, "*Bar des Sports.*"

"I want to speak to Felix," said Paul.

"He is busy."

"Tell him to stop playing cards. This is Paul—"

"Hâ, Paul. *Mais, oui . . .*"

A little later another voice said, "Then you are not in prison, Paul? They tell me from Perpignan that—"

"They tell you a lot of nonsense, Felix. Now listen, I want you to do something for me."

"Anything but lend money. With money, Paul, you are

hopeless. *Diable*, the luck you have but always you get rid of your money stupidly. It is a pity about your father—"

"What's my father got to do with this?"

"Your mother she was French, and your father English. *Mon gar*, it makes the pattern. From her you learn the value of money, but always from your father's side you find ways of being foolish with it. Anything but money I do for you."

"I don't want money. I want two telegrams from Paris. You'll sign them both as the Comte D'Auxier. You'll send one to Mme. Fouret here at the Villa Triton—"

"She is young, good-looking, wealthy?"

"No."

"A pity. For the day you really fall in love I wait. That day you do something extraordinary. I have envy to live to see it—"

"Felix, listen to me. You talk too much. Send a telegram to Mme. Fouret saying that you—as Comte d'Auxier—have withdrawn the Villa Triton from the market and have lent it to an English friend of yours, M. Paul Ashcroft, for the summer. He arrives tomorrow."

"And the other?"

"Exactly the same, only to the house agents here . . ." Paul

dictated the address to Felix, and then went on, "And keep all this to yourself, Felix."

"But certainly, Paul. And this time try and save the money. You are clever, but always you end up with a bicycle and a suitcase. What kind of future is that?"

"Go back to your game and leave the future to me."

Paul rang off. For a moment as he lay back on the bed and stared at the ceiling his face was solemn. People worried too much about the future. That was all right when you began to get old around thirty-five, but at twenty-eight the present was the important thing—the fat, rich, happy present. The solemn look went from his face and he grinned. At this moment of the present he was hungry.

He went down to the wide expensive reaches of the hotel and found the American Bar. He ordered himself a glass of mineral water, and quite unmoved by the bartender's disapproval he began to make a meal from the olives, potato chips, and cheese snacks. The pickles he left alone. They always gave him indigestion.

After a while a middle-aged man and woman came into the bar and ordered two dry Martinis. They were Americans and the man wore a hand-painted silk tie showing the

Seven Wonders of the World.

And then, when Paul was just starting on his second dish of potato chips, another person came into the bar.

Paul, who was a very susceptible young man, fell in love with her at once. Now this wasn't surprising. Women, he considered, were the most wonderful creatures on earth and it was not unusual for him to fall in love three or four times a day. It was a harmless exercise and he seldom did anything about it. His heart would just give a quick bump and a feeling would spread through his body as though he had just swallowed a glass of brandy in a hurry.

But with this girl it was rather different. His heart gave a louder bump than usual and he felt as though he had swallowed a large glass of Pernod without water. Sensibly he put the exaggerated sensations down to a tiring day and an empty stomach.

She was French. As she ordered a glass of tonic water from the bartender her voice made this clear. And she was hungry and short of money. This Paul realized from the manner in which the bartender served her and the despairing roll of his eyes as she, too, began to make a free meal from the bar savories.

In the old days, thought Paul, one went to a monastery for a free meal and hot soup, but nowadays the American bars of the de luxe hotels were the great dispensers of charity.

He smiled at the girl as he caught her eye. She looked through him coldly for three seconds and then turned away. He shifted a little on his seat as he weathered the second impression of a neat Pernod coursing through him.

Wonderful, he thought; a wonderful creature with a neat, pretty little head, crowned with loose black curls, a brown healthy skin, a flash of scarlet lips, the most beautiful, half-bare shoulders over which she wore a green silk scarf, and a body that was sheer poetry . . .

"She walks in beauty like the night . . ." quoted Paul to himself and noticed that she had a small run in her left stocking. It made the picture perfect for him.

A moment later, as she reached out for a dish of olives, she knocked her large handbag from the bar counter to the floor. Paul and the American with the tie started for it, but the American won. Normally, Paul was a fast starter and could have beaten the middle-aged American easily, but this time he was a little slow off the mark because he was wondering why

the girl had knocked her bag deliberately to the ground. He soon knew.

As the American placed the bag back on the counter, saying, "Your bag, mademoiselle . . ." it toppled over and, being open from the fall, a small bronze statuette fell out.

The girl said, "Thank you, monsieur," in English and stood the statuette up on the bar. It was a figure of the Greek god Hermes.

"Oh, how cute. Isn't that cute, dear?" said the American's wife who, with the sharp instinct of all women, had come around his flank and was now edging between him and the girl.

"You like it?" The girl was smiling at them. Her accent when she spoke English, Paul decided, improved the language.

"Certainly do, mademoiselle. Why it's a perfect little thing."

"It's lovely, *n'est-ce pas?* He was the god of science and commerce and the patron of travelers." The girl's hand caressed the statuette lovingly for a moment. "One of the fishermen here brought it up in his net. It happens, you know, from time to time. So many Roman galleys were sunk off this coast in the ancient days. I'm very fond of my little god."

But not so fond of him, Paul knew, that she wouldn't be

prepared to sell him. And in about five minutes she had, for \$30. "A genuine antique from the bottom of the Mediterranean. Gee, that's something."

When the Americans had gone into the dining room, the girl stayed on for a few moments at the bar while the bartender changed her dollars into francs.

Paul caught her eye. Something was wrong with her. Normally when he was in love he was content to worship from afar. Now he felt he wanted to draw closer.

"A beautiful little figure, mademoiselle," he said, smiling, his eyes going over her. "But also you should have told them that he was the patron of rogues, vagabonds, and—"

"There is no need for monsieur to improve my classical knowledge." She gathered up a bundle of francs from the bartender.

"But of course, mademoiselle. There is nothing about you that needs improvement."

She gave him the beginning of a frown, changed it to the beginning of a smile, and then decided on the frown. Pursing her lips a little she said, "Zut!" and walked out of the bar.

Charming, delicious...

Paul's heart gave a couple of loud bumps, and heady with emotion he said to the

bartender, "Who is she?"

Rather stiffly the bartender answered, "Monsieur, I do not discuss the people who take free meals at my bar. For me they do not exist."

Paul arrived at the Villa Triton at three o'clock the next afternoon. He had hired a chauffeur-driven car for the week. In addition to his own, he had two suitcases which he had bought in a junk shop and stuffed with old papers and a few heavy stones, and a large bunch of dark red roses which he presented to an unwelcome Madame Fouret.

She was stiff and prim and full of disappointment. Only that morning, because of this young English friend of the Count's, M. Durobat had telephoned to say that he would not be taking the villa after all as he understood from the agents that the Count had withdrawn it from the market. She herself had received a telegram confirming this early that morning.

"The roses, madame, are for you," said Paul, presenting them to her. "When I left the Count after he had so kindly and so generously offered me the villa for the summer, he said, 'But above all you must look after Mme. Fouret well for me.' He has a great affection for

you, madame. So I ask myself what is the first step to a woman's heart—and the answer is roses. You like roses, I hope?"

Mme. Fouret did and she felt herself soften a little toward him as she took them. Only yesterday talking in the garden about flowers with dear M. Durobat she had confessed that dark red roses were her favorites.

"You are very kind, monsieur," she said.

She didn't thaw right away but the signs were there and Paul was in no hurry. He had all summer before him. She showed him around the villa and from his knowledge of the place he was able to pretend that he had stayed there before. Finally, she left him in the Count's bedroom, a wide, airy room with a balcony overlooking the private beach, a room with a great bed shaped like a conch shell and hung with blue silk curtains, a room with a soft blue carpet into which the feet sank with a luxurious, whispering noise.

Before she went Mme. Fouret asked, "You will dine here tonight, monsieur?"

"No, madame. I have friends in town with whom I must dine. Tomorrow we will talk about engaging more servants. I have many friends in the district and

shall entertain a little, you understand. But everything will be left to you. The Count assures me that in your hands these matters are accomplished to perfection. You would not, I suppose, madame, consider leaving the Count's service and coming with me to England at the end of the summer?"

"Oh, monsieur, that is not the way to treat your friendship with the Count." Mme. Fouret laughed, but the compliment was like the first warmth of a liqueur inside her. He was young, and English—so much against him—and he had deprived her of M. Durobat; but even so, she liked the way his eyes sparkled and the deference he paid her. Given another twenty years and he would have been perfect.

"For a pearl like you, madame, I would jeopardize any friendship. Look at this villa, so beautifully kept. One has only to walk into the place to understand that the Mme. Fourets of this world are rare indeed."

When she was gone Paul unpacked his own suitcase. He owned the suit he wore, evening clothes, a pair of white flannels, a blue blazer, and, of course, M. Durobat's outfit. This last he locked away in one of the other cases.

He borrowed a bathing suit

and a beach robe from the Count's closet and went down to the sea. He sunbathed for an hour and if he had been a cat he would have purred. Things were going well, and he knew that Mme. Fouret would give him no trouble.

Coming up from the beach in his robe, he wandered quietly through the villa. Comte d'Auxier was obviously a very wealthy man. Paul went through each room pricetagging its contents with an acumen any insurance assessor would have envied. When he eventually reached his bedroom the large pockets of the beach robe were full of small but valuable articles which Mme. Fouret would not immediately miss—four silver ashtrays, a small jade Buddha, a silver inkstand, and a little miniature of Marie Antoinette painted on ivory.

As Paul with great care wrapped and packed them all into a parcel he totaled their value—with luck, 4000 francs. That, he told himself, would be enough to set the ball rolling, that and luck, and only a fool ever questioned his luck.

He took a shower and changed leisurely into his evening clothes as the dusk came idly in across the sea turning it to a dark ultramarine. The air through the open window was full of the secret of

syringa, jasmine, and oleanders, and a few fireflies were dancing under the branches of a pomegranate tree. He stood at the window taking it all in, and the odd thing was that for a while he almost felt that he really was a friend of Comte d'Auxier, that he had a right to be here, that he really was a wealthy young Englishman whose father owned a boot-and-shoe factory in the Midlands as he had hinted to Mme. Fouret.

The only thing missing was someone to share it all—someone young, with dark eyes, red lips, and a head of black curls. He sighed. For about twenty seconds he almost regretted having to invent his own fictions and live them.

The sight of the paper parcel on his bed brought him back to himself. He picked up the house telephone and asked Mme. Fouret to tell the hired chauffeur to bring the car around.

He drove into town sitting next to the chauffeur. Paul preferred always to talk to people, rather than to be on his own. He had an enormous curiosity about them, especially those who suffered from the unimaginative system of economics against which he had rebelled. Already he knew that Mme. Fouret had a sister in the town who was convinced that a

month's treatment—alas, too expensive even to be considered—at Aix-les-bains would cure her rheumatism. And from the chauffeur he learned now that his son's ambition was to study music at the Paris conservatoire—ambitions, dreams, fading hopes—people were full of them.

The lights were on along the waterfront, looping away like a great line of colored beads; the front of the Casino was floodlit, and an idle happy evening crowd eddied gently across the road.

He had the car stop outside a dingy-looking jeweler's shop.

As he went inside there was a girl standing at the counter talking to the shopman.

He heard her say, "All right, a thousand, but you are a rogue and I hope at supper tonight your bad conscience gives you indigestion."

He knew the voice and he knew the girl. Even in the gloom of the shop the black curls shone. He drew back into the shadows as the jeweler answered, "Good business and a bad conscience, Mlle. Elise, they go together. As for indigestion I have been a martyr to it for twenty years. One thousand francs for your ring, and if you wish to buy it back at any time you can have it for eleven hundred."

"*Monstre!*"

From her, Paul decided, the word was a compliment, and he saw the old man smile as he passed the money over. As she turned toward the door, Paul—a sense of delicacy was strong in him—pretended to study some coffee cups in a case, his back to her. When she had gone he went up to the counter and spread the contents of his parcel before the jeweler.

Elise, what a name. It described her perfectly—Elise.

"Her other name is Benoit, monsieur, and for the next hour she will be taking her supper at the *Dauphin Vert* which is a little café five hundred yards beyond the Casino."

Paul looked at him in astonishment. "Did I say her name aloud?"

"You did, monsieur; but I do not blame you. You are at the age. Now, what have we here?"

He was a bent-up little man who looked as though he had spent most of his life trying to bore a hole through the top of his breastbone with his chin. He examined the things Paul had brought carefully.

"To sell or to pawn?"

"To raise a loan, papa, for a few days."

"Two thousand."

"Really, papa . . ." Paul shook his head sadly. "The

little miniature of Marie Antoinette is worth that. Beautiful, isn't it? They say she washed in nothing but milk."

"She lost her head. Twenty-five hundred."

"Five thousand, papa. If I don't come back you make a profit of two thousand."

The old man looked at Paul's evening dress. "You go to the Casino, perhaps? Then you won't come back. Three thousand at ten per cent interest a day. You know it is illegal for me to do this?"

"We all have our worries, papa. The pawnshop is shut and I need the money tonight. The little Buddha is exquisite. It should be in the Louvre. Thirty-five hundred and seven per cent a day."

"Maybe the little Buddha does come from the Louvre? You have, perhaps, the Mona Lisa as well?"

"Next week, papa."

The man's chin came off his chest and a pair of watery brown eyes stared at Paul. Then he smiled and began to collect the objects together. "Thirty-three hundred at—"

"Seven per cent."

The old man shrugged and got the money from his till.

Paul picked up the notes and then he counted out one thousand fifty francs and passed them back.

"What is this for, monsieur?"

"The ring that belongs to Mlle. Elise Benoit, papa."

"Eleven hundred, monsieur."

Paul shook his head sadly. "Papa, were you never in love? Does a woman's distress mean nothing to you?"

The old man smiled. "Yes, and yes, my son. But now I am sixty and in business. It is you who are in love. Is that a time to be mean and to argue over fifty francs?"

Paul passed over another fifty francs and the ring was handed to him in a little box. As Paul left the shop the jeweler called after him

"She has a temper at times, my son. But do not be alarmed. It is the salt that brings out the true savor of love. *Bonne chance!*"

Outside Paul dismissed his chauffeur and walked along to the *Dauphin Vert*.

Elise was sitting in a little alcove with a glass of white wine and a plate of *moules marinières*. Paul walked up to her and with a smile took the other seat at the table.

"*Bonsoir*, Mlle. Benoit," he said.

"*Bonsoir*, monsieur, *je-ne-sais-qui*, and I would like to point out that there are plenty of other tables unoccupied at

which you might sit."

"Ashcroft is the name, Paul Ashcroft. I have often said that only a Frenchwoman knows how to eat shellfish with grace and elegance, and you, mademoiselle, are all grace and elegance."

"For an Englishman you speak French too well."

"My mother was French."

She was watching him closely, her face a little grave but with the hint of amusement somewhere in her eyes.

"Then your mother should have instructed you that a gentleman does not sit uninited at a lady's table."

"My mother was very absentminded, mademoiselle. She must have forgotten."

"You wish to talk to me?"

"If you like. But I am quite happy just to watch you."

Paul looked at her and he could have gone on looking for hours. It was odd, really. He had seen girls as beautiful before, and had fallen in love with them. But not with quite such a bump and such a boost to the blood circulation. The way she fished a mussel from its shell and carried it to that lovely mouth was sheer poetry; the way her arms moved—he sighed.

"It would be better, monsieur, perhaps, if you talked. When you just look you have a

silly expression on your face." She smiled fleetingly.

"Mademoiselle, I am in love with you."

She nodded gravely and then ate two more mussels, took a sip of wine, and finally said, "So?"

"That is all. I am in love with you."

She looked at him shrewdly for a moment and then, cocking one eyebrow in a movement that entranced Paul, said, "You are certain that your father was an Englishman and not a Spaniard?"

Paul nodded. "Ashcroft. James Wigmore Ashcroft, the biggest boot manufacturer in the Midlands of England. The firm was started during the Crimean War, supplying boots to the army."

"Ah, I understand. It happens during every war. Profiteering. So your father makes boots... What do you make, monsieur?"

"I spend the money he makes making boots. And I am in love with you."

"So, now we have had your biography. At least it has the merit of being short—if dull. Or maybe you wish to sell me some boots?"

"I wish just to be with you."

"You are a young man who usually gets what he wants?"

"But of course."

"It is good then that for once you should be disappointed. Raoul!" She raised her voice a little and called to the waiter.

"You wish for something else?" said Paul eagerly. "Please let me order it."

"It is not necessary, monsieur. I can order for myself."

Raoul came to the table. He was big, blue-jowled, and muscularly amiable.

"Mlle. Elise?" The way he spoke showed that for her he would do anything. Paul knew just how he felt.

"Raoul, tell this gentleman that if he has not left the place within ten seconds you will be obliged to throw him out."

Raoul grinned. "*Avec plaisir . . . c'est un de ces types, eh? Monsieur?*" He turned to Paul.

Paul rose.

"I'm going. But the wonderful fact remains that I love you."

Raoul answered for her.

"It is not a wonder, monsieur. The whole town loves mademoiselle. You are one among many. *Et puis, alors, va-t'en!*"

He advanced on Paul who backed away with good grace, gave Elise a little bow, and then made for the door. But behind him on the table, to be discovered by her later, Paul left the little box with the ring in it.

Half an hour later Paul, elated with love, was at the Casino shrewdly looking round the over-rich crowd in search of his first victim. Paul never gambled at the Casinos, there was little excitement in it for him, and he knew better ways of gaining and getting rid of money.

Within ten minutes his mind was made up. He picked a Signora Busoni—he obtained those facts later—the middle-aged widow of a Milan industrialist (silk, motor scooters, and a patent cream for developing the bust), wearing a magenta dress, plump, a little giggly, and with a thick frost of diamonds about her neck and wrists.

He watched her play for a while, then followed her into the bar, and in no time at all was sharing a bottle of champagne with her.

He drank, toasting, "*La bella Italia,*" and then, lowering his glass, an appealing melancholy in his eyes, he blinked as her diamonds glittered like chips of blue ice. Before he left her their friendship was well underway.

Within a week Paul was firmly established at the villa. He engaged a cook and a couple of maids to help Mme. Fouret, and he now began to entertain. Chiefly Signora Busoni. And

through Signora Busoni he was introduced to other wealthy people in the district. M. Paul became a great favorite, always smiling, always so gay, always ready to throw himself into the spirit of a party.

Madame Fouret quite took him to heart. She was never neglected. He gave her little presents and was full of compliments for the way she ran the house for him. And for her it was a pleasure to have the villa alive with people, to have around her always the stir of a happy, changing company. Comte d'Auxier had seldom done any entertaining.

At the beginning of the second week Paul decided that he must start work. His money was running out.

On an evening when he was due to call for Signora Busoni and take her to a party, he telephoned her:

"Signora, I have to drive to Cannes on urgent business this evening. I am heartbroken. But I will be back as soon as I can and join you at the party. . . Yes, very urgent business, *cara signora*. It would have to be to tear me away from such a charming companion."

He heard her rich giggle at the other end of the line.

He waited an hour and then took his car out without the chauffeur. He drove along the

coast, through the town, and then parked about half a mile beyond Signora Busoni's villa, which faced the sea.

He knew the villa well from his visits there, and he knew, too, that the old couple who looked after it for Signora Busoni always spent their evenings in the kitchen playing cards and arguing with one another.

Whistling gently to himself, he walked back along the road to the villa, keeping in the shadows. Ten minutes later he was in the villa garden, but not whistling now. He could see a light in the back of the villa where the old couple sat in the kitchen.

He pulled on a pair of black gloves and a few moments later was climbing up one of the pillars of the balcony that fronted Signora Busoni's bedroom. He went in through the French windows and, once inside, pulled the heavy curtains and switched on the light. He crossed to the door and locked it on the inside.

It was a small room, floridly decorated, its air heavy with perfume. He stood with a reflective smile on his face. The trouble with wealthy widows like Signora Busoni, apart from not willingly sharing their good fortune with others, was that they talked too much. Already

he knew where the safe was—behind a small picture near the bed.

He took the picture down and eyed the safe quizzically. It had a combination lock. From long experience Paul knew that it might take him from five minutes to three hours to listen to the fall of the tumblers and break the combination. Women hated such locks. They were always afraid of forgetting the combination.

It took him only fifteen minutes to find where Signora Busoni had written the combination. It was in a little telephone number book in a drawer of an *escritoire* near the window. She'd listed it as "Busoni 7835," which Paul knew was not the telephone number of her villa.

He opened the safe door and within five minutes the contents of the jewel cases were deposited in the bottom of a silk pillow case that he took from the bed. He went around the room and skimmed the cream of its contents, putting them one by one in the pillow case—the silver dressing-table fittings, a gold wristlet watch, and, surprisingly, a photograph of Signora Busoni in a plain leather frame.

Then, after unlocking the bedroom door, Paul drew the curtains and left. It was all done

quietly and calmly. A young man in evening dress and black gloves occupying himself soberly with his professional business—a young man who knew that the world was his oyster and had no intention of letting the knife slip and cut him as he opened it.

Signora Busoni was delighted when Paul arrived at the party just before midnight. She was delighted when he danced with her, and delighted when he offered to drive her home. She would not have been delighted had she known what was locked in the trunk of his car.

He went in with her for a drink before he left for his own villa.

"Fix yourself a drink, *caro* Paul, while I go up and get rid of this wrap and freshen my face."

"Can I mix one for you?"

"No, thank you."

As she disappeared up the stairs Paul poured himself a large brandy and also one for her. He knew she would need it when she came down. He knew so well how the scene would go—and quite frankly it was the one moment in the whole process which he did not like. Taking money from the rich caused him no qualms; but the sight of distress on any woman's face always disturbed him.

The whole scene went exactly as he knew it would. Signora Busoni appeared at the head of the stairs, a large, plumpish figure in a purple evening gown, a thick rope of pearls about her neck, and throwing her arms high cried, "Paul. Oh, Paul! The most terrible thing! I've been robbed."

And then she was bouncing down the stairs as fast as she could, crying, "The police! The police!"

Paul stopped her at the bottom of the stairs with a glass of brandy. He helped her to a chair and fussed around her.

"Drink your brandy, dear signora. It is the best thing for shock. What a dreadful affair... and while you were dancing so happily... There, there, don't move, I shall arrange everything." He filled her glass again, and then said, "May I go up and have a look? I have some experience in these matters."

"Oh, Paul, you are so kind—such a comfort at a moment like this."

"Sit there, dear signora, and leave everything to me."

Paul disappeared upstairs and was soon down again. He stood in front of Signora Busoni, his face solemn.

"What is it, Paul?" she asked.

"You know exactly what has been taken?"

"But of course. I have only to look to tell." And Signora Busoni rattled off a list which omitted nothing, as Paul well knew. She finished up, "Even a photograph of myself the thief took."

Paul looked speculatively at her. "Really? A photograph?" He was silent, his brows puckered in thought.

"Why do you look like that, Paul?"

He put a hand on her shoulder comfortingly. "It was just a thought. Still, there might be something in it." Then with a shake of his head he said, "No, there couldn't be. Our best plan is to inform the police." As he moved toward the telephone he seemed to say to himself, "But it's odd—very odd. I wonder...?"

"Paul, what's in your mind? Tell me. Why should a thief take a valueless photograph?"

He turned back to her, nursing his glass of brandy.

"Signora Busoni," he said gravely, "I think, maybe, I can answer that question. I think, maybe, I see some hope—"

"You do?" she cried expectantly. "Oh, Paul, tell me."

He took her hand and stroked it sympathetically.

"You must be patient with me. You see, some years ago

while I was staying in Marseilles I did a service for a man who is known as Gringo the Greek. He is—well, a big man in the underworld there. A thief but an unusual one. I do not wish to go into the details of the help I gave him except that it was quite legitimate and he was very grateful."

"You think he stole my jewels?"

"I am certain, dear Signora. You see, I became very friendly with him and once he took me to his house and showed me an extraordinary thing. All around his room there were photographs of men and women. It is a kind of kink with him that whenever he does a job he takes a photograph of the person he has robbed."

"What a scoundrel!"

"In some ways, yes. But in others, no. He is a man who has a good side to him."

"For that I care nothing, Paul," said Signora Busoni sharply. "We must telephone the police about him at once."

"But of course." He moved toward the telephone. Then he stopped and turned toward her, his eyes full of friendly concern. "But would it help? He will have alibis, and you may never see your jewels again. But because you are my friend, dear signora, and I would do anything for you, I

could go to him. He will do anything for me."

"You mean that he would give you my things back?" There was a rising note of hope in her voice.

"Well, not quite... But he might sell them back."

"But why should I pay for my own jewels!" Hope was now replaced by outrage.

Paul nodded. "Of course, it's preposterous, dear signora." He filled her brandy glass for her again. "But look at it this way. If we call in the police, isn't there a great risk you won't get your jewels back at all? Gringo's very clever, and very slippery."

He paused, sipping his brandy. "But he's a man who always remembers his friends. If I could talk to him." He saw that she was hanging on his every word now. This was the moment, the fraction of time when a woman swings between two minds. "What are the jewels worth?" he asked.

"One hundred and twenty-five thousand francs at least."

"So, nearly ten thousand pounds. To return them and make a little profit for himself and to oblige me because you are my dear friend, he might charge, say, one thousand pounds... Maybe I can persuade him to accept twelve thousand francs... No,

no . . .” Paul turned away from her. “Perhaps the whole idea is stupid. Why should he do this for me? Maybe we *should* tell the police.”

Signora Busoni considered this. Then her mind like a calculating machine produced its answer.

“Paul.” Her voice was suddenly solemn behind him.

He turned.

“Paul, it would be worth trying—if you think you might get them back for that price?”

“I shall do everything—everything I can. But if it succeeds, signora, then no one must ever know. Our secret, *cara signora*. If the police knew we might both be in trouble.”

“Paul, you must do this. Offer twelve thousand francs—but not a sou more!”

“Dear lady.” Paul took her hand and kissed it. “Tomorrow I go to Marseilles. I shall do my best, of course.”

Paul did do his best. Two days later Signora Busoni got her jewels back—for fifteen thousand francs. The money was paid in cash to Paul to be handed to Gringo. So far as Paul knew Gringo might no longer be alive. Long, long ago he had vaguely known a small crook of that name in Marseilles, and more than once he had used his name on occasions like this.

The cash went into a large, old-fashioned safe in the billiard room at the Villa Triton to which Mme. Fouret had given Paul the key.

The following morning Paul was sunbathing on the private beach when Mme. Fouret brought a visitor down to him.

“Mlle. Benoît,” she announced, and withdrew toward the villa, her back stiff and disapproving.

Paul stood up and the blood rushing to his head made the world turn over giddily before his eyes—a swirl of blue sky, pink villa, and dark cypress trees, and at the center of the cartwheel a slim cool figure in a white silk dress, with a touch of scarlet scarf at the throat to match the soft scarlet lips. The wheel steadied and Elise was smiling at him.

“Monsieur, it has taken me a little while to find you.”

“Call me Paul, please.”

She hesitated for a moment, raised an eyebrow doubtfully and deliciously, and then with a little laugh she suddenly said, “All right—Paul.”

“Thank you, Elise. Now the morning is perfect.”

“I came to thank you for returning my ring. It was very generous of you. But I cannot accept it without—”

Paul frowned and stepped

forward menacingly. "Elise, if you are now going to try and pay me back I shall pick you up and throw you into the sea. Can you swim?"

"Yes."

"A pity. Because I could then have jumped in and saved you. However, let us have no talk of money. I have more than I know what to do with."

"I was not going to offer you money. In the first place, it would be ungracious to spoil a generous act, and, secondly, I could not afford it. But in return I should like you to accept this . . ."

From behind her back she produced a little bronze figure of Hermes.

" . . . it was brought up by a fisherman—"

"I know," said Paul. "It's beautiful. But this fisherman of ours, doesn't he ever catch fish?"

Elise laughed, and to Paul the sound was like a little burst of the most exquisite music on the hot morning air.

"Between ourselves, M. Paul . . ."

"Paul."

" . . . Paul, I make them in my studio."

"But isn't it a little dishonest to tell this story—"

"About the fisherman? Why? All the world is just a little dishonest. If I sell one to

an American for thirty dollars it really is worth that—and it pleases them to have a little story attached to it. Also, they think they have got a bargain—a Roman antique for thirty dollars! They go away thinking I am naive and have no sense of money."

Paul smiled. "You make other fa—I mean, antiques?"

"A few. I can turn out anything from an unmistakable Picasso to an authentic Etruscan vase."

"You're wonderful."

"I am very good."

"And I love you, Elise."

"Monsieur, you should not say that lightly to any woman."

"I do not say it lightly to any woman. I say it to you and I mean it."

"And after it is said, what then?"

"It is out of my hands. It is up to the woman to advance or retreat, to say yes or no."

"You are a curious one. When you smile I do not believe what you say. But when you frown and have that sad look in your eyes, then I think maybe there is a real person somewhere."

"You will have dinner with me tonight? At the *Dauphin Vert*?"

"I regret—"

"At eight o'clock."

"Impossible."

"And I shall take you for a drive afterwards."

"You are ridiculous."

"But good company."

"You should go into your father's business instead of squandering his money. You would be good at selling boots. *Au revoir*, Paul. Eight o'clock."

After she had gone Paul sat in a quiet trance until lunch-time.

Some men hurry home from work to their wives and family. But more men hurry back to pursue some passion, like fretwork, pigeon-keeping, philately, square dancing, bowls, darts—something from which there is no escape. Victims of their own natures they live in happy bondage.

Paul was a victim—not of philately, but of philanthropy. He couldn't help it. His education had been all wrong—too much Robin Hood and not enough Adam Smith. His head was full of romance, and a dishonest life had turned the milk of human kindness in him to a rich, full cream. He held the selfish view that the best thing to do with money was to spend it on other people. It was a vice with him.

And now, being in love, the urge to throw money away was ten times as strong. He was in love and he wanted the world

to be as happy as he was. After lunch he went into action. Even without Elise it would have happened. But now Paul was full of an even greater contempt for accepted economics.

While Mme. Fouret was safely having her siesta, Paul got his suitcase with the M. Durobat clothes and make-up and went down into the cellar under the villa. There he changed into the guise of M. Durobat, whistling contentedly to himself, and then made his way from the cellar through a narrow tunnel he had discovered that led to a small grotto in the garden.

An hour later he was in the town and things began to happen. A young typist in the bus office was surprised when a bearded, dignified old man with the button of the Legion of Honor walked in, raised his hat, presented her with a bottle of Chanel No. 5, and was gone before she could say a word. A woman at a stall in the market was surprised to find a two-hundred-franc note under her weights just after an old gentleman had bought some oranges from her. The oranges were given to a small boy who found in the bag with them a mouth organ.

In the early days of his new economic system Paul had found it hard to get rid of

money. Most people, he knew, resented direct charity. The natural dignity and self-respect in people made them capable of facing their own problems. But there wasn't a person in the world who could resist a surprise, an extravagant, anonymous gift from heaven.

Such a one was Mme. Fouret's sister. That afternoon she was visited by M. Durobat who insisted that the vase he had seen on the window table in her little house was Sèvres and just the piece he had been looking for. He paid two thousand francs for it and walked off, leaving her with the feeling that the world was crazy and delightful and the prospect of Aix-les-bains was now assured. The vase Paul dropped into the sea.

M. Durobat finished up the afternoon sitting on a seat in the garden of an orphanage run by the Convent of the Sacred Heart. All around him the children were at play. He had a decided weakness for children. While he was sitting there, Sister Thérèse, who was in charge of the children, came and sat by him in the shade and very soon they were chatting to one another.

Sister Thérèse was a wrinkled old apple of a woman who looked as though she would keep forever. She had a heart of

gold, a mind as keen as a new razor blade, and one conviction—that God and children and good drains were the most important things in life.

After a few moments she wrote M. Durobat down as wealthy, sentimental, and lonely, and she knew these were the qualities from which large subscriptions came. Privately she asked God in advance to forgive her for her worldly cupidity, and then went to work. She found it unexpectedly easy. When M. Durobat rose to go he pulled out his wallet and handed her four thousand francs.

"Sister, you will do me a kindness if you take this for the children."

"Monsieur is very generous."

"Not at all. It is easy to make money if you have the talent. But hard to spend it wisely. Spend it frivolously, Sister. Buy the girls pink hair ribbons and the boys—well, you will know."

"Monsieur is very understanding. Some other time it will be a pleasure to show you round the orphanage. The bathrooms—they will distress you. For years we have dreamed of raising enough money to build a new wing. And the kitchen, monsieur—so difficult to keep clean, so unhygienic and old-fashioned.

Yes, yes, you must see it all the next time you come."

M. Durobat left the town unobtrusively and picked up his bicycle from a little wood on the outskirts.

At the other end of his journey he hid the bicycle in the pine wood by the cove, and then went into the villa through the cellar.

Later that evening he motored into town to meet Elise. He spent three wonderful hours with her. Although she still did not take him seriously, she showed that she liked him, and after dinner they sat for an hour in the car on the coast road, watching the moon come up over the sea. It was the biggest, yellowest moon Paul had ever seen and he sat blissfully holding Elise's hand. He didn't try to kiss her. He was content just to be with her.

When he left her at her studio just before midnight he did not go home. He went to the Casino and found Signora Busoni there with some friends. He might be in love and not know what to do about it; but he was also in business and he more than knew what to do about that. That night he marked down a Madame Lepâtre, the wife of a Bordeaux wine merchant.

And so the days went on.

Love and business. Paul saw Elise as much as he could and now knew a lot about her. She lived with her young brother who was an artist of great promise. But the two were very poor and it was Elise's ambition to save enough money for them to go to Paris where her brother could study.

M. Durobat was now known in the town as a mysterious figure who came and went, leaving cash surprises behind him.

Meanwhile Paul Ashcroft worked. The cash in the safe mounted up and each transaction was carefully noted on a slip of paper also locked away with the money.

After a month the slip of paper made interesting reading.

Busoni	15,000 francs
Lepâtre	25,000 francs
Sturgess	35,000 francs
Bloire	5,000 francs
Brunot	25,000 francs

Mrs. Sturgess was an American holidaying in Europe without her husband and regarded the whole thing as a high adventure. Paul had the greatest difficulty in persuading her that she could not accompany him to interview Gringo. Bloire was a disappointment. She was Swiss, stubborn and tight-fisted. It took Paul two and a half hours to work the combination on her safe

and then he found that half the jewelry was paste.

Only twice did Paul fail. One safe he had been unable to open and while working on the other he had been disturbed. But on the whole he was a happy young man and he looked after his flock well, those who had been fleeced and those waiting to be fleeced. He still took Signora Busoni dancing, still invited Mesdames Lepâtre, Bloire, and Brunot to his villa and took a genuine pleasure in their company. That they had too much and he felt obliged to spend it wisely for them didn't for one moment prejudice him against them. When Mrs. Sturges, away on her travels by now, arrived in Rome and then in Athens, she found flowers from him waiting in her hotel room.

But you can't mix love and business. Paul should have known this. But like most men he had to learn it the hard way.

He came back one afternoon after playing the part of M. Durobat, edged through the bushes to the grotto in the garden, and then slipped in and along the tunnel to the cellar. By the light of a single candle perched on top of a bin of *Montrachet* '24 he stripped off his makeup and began to change back into his own clothes.

He was whistling happily but a little offkey. Life was good. Money had piled up in the old safe and M. Durobat was having the time of his life getting rid of it. He pulled on his trousers and was about to knot a tie around his neck when a voice from a shadowed archway behind him said, "There was an occasion when I said your biography was short and dull. I take it back."

Paul turned around very slowly. He knew the voice and he knew what to expect. He found himself facing Elise.

His heart went bump, but this time the noise was like a sack of wet flour hitting a muddy floor.

"Elise," he said, gulping, "you shouldn't be here."

"But naturally, *mon ami*." She was smiling but there was no comfort in the smile. "Well..." One little toe was tapping on the stone slab of the floor.

"Well, what?"

"Explain, *mon petit chou*. You know in France there is a very long prison sentence for pretending to be a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor."

Paul gave another gulp and found some of his confidence.

"There is no law which says a man can't give money away. Do good by stealth—it's a proverb."

"Ah, a proverb. Very inter-

esting. Tell me more. You give away your father's money? You like to do good?"

"Naturally—and how! the devil did you find out?"

"How did I find out. *Mon ami*, you need your head examined. I make fakes. I recognize them when I see them. False beards and mustaches—Pouf! An old man with a young man's eyes—Pouf! For other people it is all right. Not for me. But what is the game? For more than three weeks now the town talks about this curious M. Durobat—so good, so kind, so eccentric, so wealthy. Thousands of francs drop from heaven on people's heads—"

"That's better than rain."

"You think? Maybe not for some people." She threw a roll of franc notes on the floor before him. "Not for me. Not for my brother. Oh, yes, I tell you one evening that I am poor because I save everything to send my brother, who one day will be a great artist, to Paris. And what happens?"

"Well, he will be a great artist. I saw some of his stuff. It's good. Better than yours. And anyway, don't throw money around like that." Paul bent and picked up the roll of notes.

"Bah!" She stamped her foot. "So this kind M. Durobat

comes along a few days later and buys two of my brother's worst canvases for an incredible sum—enough to send him to Paris."

"Well, he wants to go to Paris, doesn't he?"

"But not this way."

"What's wrong with this way?"

"Ah, it is for that that I wish your answer. What is wrong, eh? You think I have nothing in here but wool?" She tapped her head with one finger vigorously and at the same time bore down on him. "Explain, you little half-English half-French pig!"

"Now, now, Elise, calm down. It's my money. I can do what I like with it. And you shouldn't have followed me, spied on me. Why, it's—it's not right!"

But Elise was not to be put off. She grabbed him by the ears and with her face a few inches from his, she looked him straight in the eyes.

"Tell me, *côchon*—is it your money to give away or not?"

"But, Elise—"

"Tell me!" For a second or two his head was shaken vigorously and her face danced before his eyes. "Your money or not?"

"Well . . ."

"The truth—and remember the jeweler in town is a friend of mine and we chat often. I

find it difficult to understand why a rich English monsieur should need to pawn things belonging to his friend the Count of Auxier."

"But they're out of pawn now. Back in the house."

"So it is *not* your money!"

For a moment there was silence between them. When she was angry, Paul was thinking, she looked lovelier than ever, and there was a quality about her that filled him with inexpressible longing. He sighed.

"No, Elise. It isn't my money. I can't lie to you—"

"You would if you could. *Bon!* Now sit down and tell me all about it."

She pushed him, making him sit down on a case of *Pol Roger, Cuvee de Reserve, 1943*, and stood threateningly over him. She needed only a tricolor hat and a scythe blade on a pole to look like the spirit of the French Revolution.

Paul loved her more than ever, and wondered whether to tell her the truth or invent some fiction that might not entirely blacken him. He told her the truth—much to his surprise. This was love.

She listened to him without interruption except for occasional and obscure monosyllabic French expressions of angry surprise. When he had finished

she said forcibly, "It is shameful—to make love to silly old women and then steal their money!"

"I don't make love to them."

"Who is to know that?"

"And anyway, they don't miss their money and I do a lot of good with it. And anyway again, I don't see what you have to bellyache about—"

"Don't use such terms to me, *cochon!*"

"Why complain, then? Why should you complain? You're just as dishonest with your fake antiques." He grinned, and in a high falsetto said, "One of the fishermen dragged it up in his net..."

"It's such a little thing—"

"Doesn't matter."

"And the Americans have too much money."

"No excuse. Dishonesty is dishonesty, small or big. It's the principle that counts, Elise."

"Don't lecture me." She was silent for a moment and one wonderful eyebrow went up and cocked in thought. Then she asked, "How much money have you got left in that safe?"

"I don't know. More than one hundred thousand francs."

"Then you must get rid of it. At once."

"I must?"

"Yes. Give it to Sister Thérèse. You can't give it back

to the people you took it from. It'll be enough to build the new bathrooms and the kitchens—"

"You know about that?"

Elise rolled her eyes at his naivety. "The whole town knows. Sister Thérèse talks of nothing else but the clever way she is handling this mysterious M. Durobat. In the *Dauphin Vert* they are laying bets that she will get the money before the month is out. She will, too. Tomorrow."

"If you say so," said Paul meekly. "And then how soon after that will you be ready to leave?"

"Leave?" Elise's eyes widened, dark and puzzled.

"But of course. That's what you mean, isn't it? Oh, Elise, you make me very happy." Paul stood up and took her hand. "I've been waiting for this moment so long. We'll go to Paris—and later we'll send for your brother."

Elise stepped back from him. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"But of course you do. It's obvious." Paul put out his hands and took her shoulders lovingly. "You get angry because you think I make love to these old women. You take the trouble to find out all about me and when you know the truth, what do you do? Go to the police like a good citizen?

No, you come to me. You couldn't say more clearly that you love me. Darling," he bent forward and kissed her on the cheek. "Do we get married here or in Paris?"

"You're crazy!" Her voice made a faint echo in the cobwebbed arches.

"I know, with love."

"But I don't—"

"But you do."

Paul put his arms around her and drew her to him. She came like a hypnotized bird. Then his lips were on hers and there was a roll of sound in his ears as though he had a hundred drums beating instead of a single heart.

Then suddenly the bird was no longer hypnotized and there was warmth and movement in the soft lips under his own.

Then suddenly she drew away from him, gave a little gasp, and with her face radiant she whispered huskily, "*Ma foi* . . . it is true. I am crazy. I am in love." And then reaching for him, moving swiftly into his arms, she sighed, "Now let us do it again. Now that I know what it is all about and can give my mind to it."

"*Cherie* . . ." Sigh.

"*Cheri* . . ." Sigh, cut short.

And then much later, sitting side by side on a case of champagne, Elise said with a sigh of content, "In Paris we shall be so happy."

"Of course. We will open an antique shop. Your fakes will go well, and I should meet many rich people—"

"No, nothing like that. We will work hard—and honestly."

"You mean that?" Surprise filled Paul's voice. "Not even an occasional—"

"No." And it was the "No" of a woman shaping a man's future.

"But why? Hard work is so dull."

"It is respectable. What child could respect a parent who was not honest?"

"What child is this?"

"Our children. They must be proud of their papa and mama—"

"Children!" Paul's voice echoed weakly around the cellar.

"Yes. Five. Three boys and two girls. I have it all planned. An honest, respectable family. That is marriage. You agree?" There was loving threat in the last two words.

Paul sighed. "I agree."

Elise smiled contentedly and put her arms around his neck.

"Cheri—I am glad you insist."

"Cherie . . ."

And so it was arranged later, over a bottle of *Pommery*, taken on the terrace with the sea like mauve velvet and the

sky full of polished stars and a swollen moon, that the next morning Paul should give all the money to Sister Thérèse and that a new life should start for them both. It would be hard at first, they both knew, for dishonesty, small or big, is a habit hard to break. But they were young and they were in love—two things which add up to optimism; and what can stand against optimism?

They sat, hand in hand on the terrace, undisturbed because Mme. Fouret had gone into town to visit her sister.

The next morning, while Paul was having his breakfast, Mme. Fouret came to him and, after a certain amount of skirmishing, said, "Monsieur, my sister goes to Aix-les-bains today and I was wondering . . ."

Paul nodded. "But, of course. You must go with her on the journey to look after her, and perhaps stay a few days to see her settled in?"

"Ha, monsieur, you are so understanding and so kind."

"Not at all, Mme. Fouret. Tell the chauffeur to run you into town as soon as you are ready."

And when she came back from Aix-les-bains, thought Paul, he would be gone. But he would leave a present for her. It was the best way to say goodbye.

Mme. Fouret left about ten o'clock. Paul had a swim and then before changing he went to the old safe, which was in one corner of the villa's billiard room, and opened it.

There was more than one hundred thousand francs in it . . . more than seven thousand pounds . . . One hundred thousand francs would be a fine present for Sister Thérèse, and the surplus would allow him to tip his servants, buy a few presents, and still have enough to take him to Paris. Elise, he felt, would understand that a man was entitled to dishonest traveling expenses when he journeyed to an honest living.

He locked the money back in the safe and put the key in the pocket of his beach robe. This afternoon he would change into his M. Durobat disguise and go to see Sister Thérèse. It was going to be a red letter day for her.

As a matter of fact, it was going to be quite a day for Paul, though he was blissfully unaware of it as he picked up a cue and began to knock the balls about the billiard table.

He was just about to play a difficult cannon shot and screw his own ball back off the top cushion into the bottom left-hand pocket when a shadow fell across the table.

Paul looked up. The billiard

room had a long run of wide windows facing out over the garden with a glimpse of the sea showing between two acacia trees, and in the center of the windows was an open doorway. Standing just inside the doorway was a curious trio.

In front, leaning forward with his large, fat, ring-heavy hands resting on the top of a gold-headed cane was a man with the stature and heavy-jowled face of a Napoleon. He wore a dove-gray suit, a black stock with a pearl-headed pin, lilac spats, and a flat-crowned felt hat with the brim turned up. The hat was tipped forward, giving the impression that it rested on his eyebrows, which were strong and bushy. There was a certain cowlike amiability about the large face which was strengthened by a gentle, cud-chewing action of his mouth.

On his right was a tall, solemn-faced individual in a tight navy-blue suit, the jacket open to show an even tighter blue-and-white horizontally striped fisherman's vest. He wore a white cloth cap and a frown, both of them the worse for wear.

The other person, on the left, was a youth of about seventeen with a pink-and-white handsome face, a vacant smile, brown eyes full of wonder, and an open mouth. He wore an

open leather jerkin with a mermaid painted on each arm, a blue silk shirt, red canvas trousers, and white shoes.

"Monsieur Ashcroft?" inquired the man in the dove-gray suit, and his voice was as rich as bouillabaisse.

"Yes." Paul put his cue down. "Who are you and what do you want?"

The man smiled and there was a flash of three gold teeth. He handed his cane to the youth and then picked up the cue Paul had just put down. He leaned over the table, and as he prepared for a shot, he said, "A good question and well put. Shows a keen, direct mind. I like it. One must be a bit of a psychologist these days to succeed. Must be able to mark a man down at once—particularly in business. Yes . . ."

He played the shot and the ball screwed back off the cushion into the bottom left-hand pocket. "Sweet," he sighed, and straightened up.

"I think," said Paul cautiously, "you'd better explain yourself a little more clearly."

"Naturally—but it takes time. The use of words is involved. Oh, yes . . . and psychology. Must assess a man before you know which screw to put to him." He set the balls up for another shot.

"Interesting," said Paul.

"But if you don't mind, I'll call the gardener and chauffeur and have you thrown out."

"Countermeasure. Violence. But ineffective. I'll explain why later, but I'm glad you brought it up because it's good for the boy—experience." He tipped his head over his shoulder toward the youth in the jerkin and said, "My articulated pupil. Not good material but in time we'll make something out of him. Close your mouth, André," he said gently, and then played his shot.

"I could, of course, telephone for the police," said Paul.

"You could." The gold teeth flashed again and the rings of one hand winked as he chalked the top of the cue.

"Unwise," said the tall thin man in the navy-blue suit, and his voice had the resonance of a slide of wet gravel.

"My secretary," said the man in the dove-gray suit proudly. "Accounts and legal department. M. Plume—but no dress sense." He bent forward, cocked his head as he looked along the line of his shot and said vaguely, "It's a big old-fashioned safe. How much have you got in it?"

"Look, what the hell do you think—" Paul made a hasty forward movement, but then he stopped abruptly.

Monsieur Plume and André were staring down at their right hands and the surprise on their faces matched that on Paul's. Each hand held a revolver.

"Sweet," said the man in the dove-gray suit. "But André, hold it a little higher and remember what I told you. You must have the safety catch off. That's better." He turned his head back and played his shot, potting a ball with a neat brisk stroke. "How much in the safe?" he asked, straightening up.

Paul, although no sailor, had enough sense not to row against tide and wind.

"Nothing," he said, setting an oblique course.

"Try again."

And somehow M. Plume and André had moved forward and were crowding Paul a little, and André's vacant grin had become a doglike pant.

"Just over one hundred thousand francs," Paul confessed. "And in my opinion the explanations are taking far too long."

"The preliminaries," said M. Dove-Gray, "must be observed. Opportunity for studying character on both sides."

He moved away from the table and, sinking into a large wicker chair, carefully adjusted the crease of his trousers, then took a cigar from a case. André

stretched out his left hand and held a lighter for him. "Thank you, André. And now, M. Ashcroft, the key please."

"I haven't got the key. I've lost it. I've thrown it into the sea. It's with my lawyers. Take your choice. And anyway, it's not my money."

"Good, good," said the man amiably. "You notice that, André? Bluster, smoke-screen—but not from nervousness or fear. Gives him time to think; time to plan. Well, André, you know the answer to that. Cut right through it. After all, we know where the key is, don't we. Remember we were looking through the window a little while ago."

As he spoke, M. Plume and André, eager and swift, closed in on Paul. A revolver dug in his back and another in the stomach. He coughed at the concerted pressures and André's hand relieved him of the key in the pocket of his beach robe.

"Sweet," said their master.

"Sweet. End of preliminaries.

Now to business. No, no, André—" he said sharply as the youth made a move toward the safe. "Not that at all. That's crude, unprofessional and, above all, unethical."

Then, from behind a dove-gray cloud of cigar smoke, he said benignly to Paul, "I'm surprised, monsieur, that you

don't know me. We did meet many years ago—and since then—though I take no offense—you have gone on exaggerating our acquaintance.” He stood up and gave a plump little bow. “I am Kyro Chrysantos—”

“As far as I'm concerned you can be Father Christmas!” said Paul angrily.

“No, no, you don't understand yet. Kyro Chrysantos. Or to you, monsieur, Gringo the Greek. Ha, you look surprised.”

Paul was surprised. He sat down suddenly in the chair behind him. As he did so, a change came over the company. The air of enigma and threat evaporated and an easy sense of camaraderie blossomed.

M. Plume gave Paul a cigarette and André lit it for him and M. Chrysantos said with a gentle wave of his cigar, “It is a nice place you have appropriated here and, believe me, monsieur, I am full of admiration for you. You do us all credit. Ah, André, if I could only hope that one day you would be as successful as monsieur here.”

“Tell me,” said Paul, recovering and by no means resigned to drifting for long helpless before wind and tide, “how did you learn about me? I thought you were dead or on Devil's Island?”

“Both those pleasures, M.

Paul, are happily remote. Notice now, André, this is the period of consolidation—the *va-et-vient* of cross-talk before moving into the last stage, which is, of course, amicable settlement—”

“Look,” said Paul, “couldn't you cut out the lectures? Let him do it by correspondence course or something. How did you find out?”

“But he is young, monsieur. You and I were young once and we had to learn. Besides, his father has paid me a large premium. This is a morning André will never forget.”

“Or me,” said Paul.

“Or me,” said M. Plume.

“Or me,” said Chrysantos. “So, we are all happy. Yes, we are happy. And now I tell you. Some time ago a lady, an American lady called Sturgess, is spending a few days in Marseilles and in every bar she is asking for Gringo the Greek. She wants to meet him. And this comes to my ears, so I oblige her—”

“Oh, lord!”

“It is all right, monsieur. I listened to her and I did not give you away. It seems that I stole her jewels and you bought them back from me. It is good. I take her on a tour of the underworld. She is fun. I make a little money from her. I give her my autograph and she goes

away happy. And after that I decide to come here and find M. Ashcroft. For two weeks now, monsieur, we have been in the town watching you. And now we are here, and the partnership is complete. But one hundred thousand francs is not much. I should have thought you would have had more than that."

"I have had heavy expenses, and besides, I'm an extravagant spender."

"Who is not? But to split this among four—yea, it is very little. Seventy-five thousand between you and me and twenty-five thousand for my friends... No, it is not enough."

"Oh, you mean to let me keep some? That's very generous."

"But of course. You have made it—by using my name. So we share. But it is too little considering your talent and the value of my name. Notice, André that little money is for little men. Big money, big men—and big risks, of course. Close your mouth, André. Good. Now, monsieur, I have a proposition to make to which you will agree. Notice, André, the use of the little word *will*—it establishes authority."

Paul sat there, certain that he could not let these men steal the money. Elise would give

him hell if he did. The money was to go to Sister Thérèse—all of it.

"And the proposition?" asked Paul.

"The one hundred thousand in the safe is yours. But for the time being I keep the key. I shall give you the key when we have made another one hundred thousand for me."

"And how are we to make it?"

"We do it quickly in one go. In fact, we begin today. In this town, monsieur, you may not know, but there is a very rich old man who gives his money away. M. Durobat, he is called. You have heard of him?"

"I have," said Paul faintly.

"Each afternoon he comes to the town. This afternoon we kidnap him, bring him here—and he pays a ransom of one hundred thousand francs." Chrysantos beamed happily at Paul. "Observe, André, I am concise when it comes to the plan. Sharp, direct, no beating about the mulberry tree."

Then to Paul, he said, "What do you say, monsieur? Ah, I see you are overcome by the brilliance of my plan."

Paul stood up. "What do I think? I think that at this moment we all need a drink."

"Excellent!" cried Chrysantos. "Notice, André—the moment of accord. The bargain to

be sealed with this hospitable offer of refreshment. So civilized. Later, we shall choose our bedrooms and make ourselves comfortable here."

Paul smiled bleakly. "For the moment let's have a drink." He was moving to do something about it when a voice from the open doorway said, "Don't bother, Paul, *cheri*, I'll get them." Elise was standing there. "I came back with your chauffeur whom I met in town."

Chrysantos was on his feet and bowing, André gaped a little more, and M. Plume frowned and blinked. Their reactions were reasonable—the tribute of those who look on loveliness. She stood there beautiful and composed, in a gold dress, her dark hair shining, her scarlet lips like soft petals, and her eyes on Paul.

"You heard?" said Paul.

"Everything," said Elise. "I think it is a wonderful idea. Brilliant." She smiled at Chrysantos.

"Who is this?" asked Chrysantos admiringly. His heart was melting like candle wax.

"She's . . . she's—"

"I'm his accomplice," said Elise easily. "We always work together." And then as she came into the room and walked entrancingly toward the side-table that held the drinks, she

went on, "Remember, André—if you work a high-class racket, you must have a high-class accomplice."

"Charming," said Chrysantos, ravished. "Charming. Oh, happy André . . . what a morning, what an experience for you, for us all!" He bounded forward like a rubber ball to help Elise, while Paul said weakly, "Make mine a large dry Martini . . ."

It certainly was an experience. Paul could not deny that. He had to kidnap himself and find a one-hundred-thousand-franc ransom. A wild ghost chase.

"It's difficult," he said to Elise. They were walking in the garden before lunch. Gringo and his two henchmen were in the billiard room playing snooker. They weren't concerned with keeping an eye on Paul. If he liked to run out on them he was welcome. The one hundred thousand francs in the safe would go to them.

"But not impossible," said Elise firmly. "That money in the safe is going to the orphanage—and then we're going to Paris and raise a family."

"But how can I kidnap myself?"

"You won't. I shall kidnap you—with the help of Gringo. We'll bring you back here

blindfolded and put you in the cellar. Then you can change back into your proper clothes, slip out through the grotto and into the house."

"But at any moment Gringo may go down to the cellar. There won't be anyone there. He'll expect the old man to eat... and then there will be the ransom arrangements to make."

"Of course, but I shall do all that. The first principle in kidnaping is to keep the contacts with the kidnaped as few as possible. Gringo will see that—"

"It'll be a wonderful object lesson for André, too. All right, they never know that the cellar is empty. But what about the one hundred thousand?"

"We shall have to think about that. Let's get the old man safely in the cellar first."

"You're wonderful. Anyone would think you'd been kidnaping people all your life."

And Paul went on thinking she was wonderful. Halfway through a lunch, pleasantly punctuated by Gringo's tips on etiquette to André ("A bad mannered crook, André, can only operate in a working-class milieu. The big money is in the finger-bowl and one-napkin-a-meal set"), Elise took charge and not even Gringo had any criticism to make.

Late every afternoon before leaving the town M. Durobat was in the habit of taking an aperitif at the *Dauphin Vert*. Elise was to get into conversation with him there and then offer to drive him home. They would go off in the car and just outside the town Gringo, hidden in the back, would reveal himself and blindfold the old man.

Then the old man would be brought to the villa and marched down to the cellar. After that only Elise would have contact with him. While all this was going on, Paul and M. Plume and André would establish sound alibis. Paul would go off to tea with Signora Busoni and the other two spend the afternoon bathing on the beach at the little cove.

"Perfect," said Gringo, beaming at Elise. Then to Paul, he declared, "You are lucky to have such a partner. Brains and beauty. Note that, André, it's a formidable combination."

Paul nodded. "She took a lot of training, though. When she first came to me she was raw and gauche—no dress sense, no *savoir faire*—"

He broke off with a wince as Elise kicked him under the table.

"So?" mused Gringo. "We must compare our training methods sometime."

"Money," said M. Plume hollowly. "How do we get the money out of the old gaga?"

"Later," said Gringo. "We fix that when he is in the cellar."

"He must have a bed in the cellar. Every comfort," said Elise. "I shall need help fixing the place up."

"We shall do it together," said Gringo, and the trio of gold teeth flashed as he smiled gallantly at her.

The kidnaping went like a dream.

"Sweet . . ."

Gringo kept saying it to himself as he and Elise drove home.

M. Durobat alongside her was blindfolded and dignified. Gringo kept his revolver pressed between the old man's shoulder blades and couldn't control a conversational urge.

"You are immensely wealthy, monsieur, I believe?"

"Immoderately so, yes."

"You understand what is happening to you?"

"But of course."

"We put your value at one hundred thousand francs—a mere bagatelle for you."

"You won't get a sou out of me."

"We shall see."

That evening—with a phantom M. Durobat locked up

in the cellar—the party at the villa was quite gay. In fact, Gringo and his two friends were more than a little gay. Champagne and the prospect of easy money had gone to their heads.

Gringo, entirely captivated by Elise, pursued her with elephantine gallantries and it was while he watched this exhibition that an idea came to Paul. Later he got Elise alone.

"You've made quite a hit with Gringo."

"That's true. He's already suggesting that if I get tired of working for you he would be delighted to give me a job."

"I'll knock his head off."

He put his arms around her and kissed her.

Elise sighed. He kissed her again.

Then he said, "I've an idea how we can get that money out of the safe and give these people the slip. But it depends on you."

"Tell me."

Paul did, and the next morning a period of stalemate began so far as M. Durobat was concerned.

Elise coming up from the cellar after taking the old man breakfast reported to the party that he refused to say where he lived or to countenance any question of paying them money.

"He says he's quite happy to spend the rest of his life in the cellar."

"I don't blame him," said Paul. "There's enough drink there to last a lifetime."

"Obstinate," said M. Plume.

"Maybe, Gringo, I should twist his arm a little," suggested André.

"No, André. He is old and a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor. We are not monsters—yet. No, no, we shall starve him a little to begin with. He is used to eating well."

So they starved M. Durobat for a day and a half and at the end of that time Elise reported, "He says he can live on his fat for another week. He is quite happy with champagne and brandy."

"We must remove the drink," said M. Plume.

"Impossible," said Paul. "It would take two days to do it and Elise couldn't do it alone. That means he would see us and be able to recognize us later."

"Quite right," said Gringo. "Remember, André, anonymity is the foundation of all kidnaping. For mademoiselle here, it is different. A beautiful face is harder to trace than an ugly one. She dyes her hair red, changes her lipstick, and goes to Italy for a couple of months. No, here we are up against the courage of a true Frenchman."

"I twist his arm, maybe," suggested André.

Gringo shook his head. "Always with you, André, it is too much or too little. What is a twist of the arm at this stage? A mosquito bite. No, mademoiselle, you tell him that if tomorrow he does not cooperate we shall cut off one of his ears."

"Who's going to cut it off?" asked Paul.

Gringo smiled. "Why, André, of course. It will mark the end of his apprenticeship. Just think, André—" he patted the youth on the shoulder "—your first ear."

André looked a little pale, gulped, and said, "The left or the right?"

"The right," said Gringo.

But the next morning Elise reported, "He says that it is of no consequence. He is beyond the age where his looks are important. But he insists that you use a sharp knife."

"A man of spirit," said Gringo admiringly. "André, you had better spend the morning sharpening your knife. Maybe when he sees we mean business he will change his mind."

André gulped and said, "Maybe it is too great an honor for me. Maybe, Gringo, I am not sufficiently experienced yet—"

"Nonsense, André. Every

man is a little nervous until the moment comes—"

"Sure," said Paul, "I remember my first ear. I had rats in the tummy until I started—and then everything was all right."

"It doesn't bleed—not so much as you imagine," said M. Plume hollowly.

"Of course not," said Gringo stoutly. "And after that, M. Plume shall have the left ear, if necessary."

Elise gave Gringo a warm admiring smile. "You are a man of iron—it is good to work with someone of such strength of character. Ruthlessness in a man stirs a woman."

"Mademoiselle," Gringo gave a little bow, "beneath the iron is a core of softness, a heart full of tenderness." He took her hand and kissed it.

Ten minutes later, as Elise strolled by herself on the terrace above the sea, Gringo came out to her. He presented her with a rose and kissed her hand again.

"Sweet..." he said. "The morning is beautiful, the bright flowers, the blue sea and you, mademoiselle, like a jewel amidst them all. In you I recognize the woman I have been looking for all my life."

"And now you have found me?" She glanced at him coquettishly.

Gringo rolled his eyes in

delight. "Poor André, poor Plume, and poor Paul—such subtlety is beyond them. You and I, Mlle. Elise, operate on a higher plane. We understand one another without words."

"Let's use words for a while, anyway... Kyro."

Gringo sighed like a leaky boiler. "Kyro... Elise... two notes of music."

"Words," said Elise. "Not music."

Gringo came back to earth and said shrewdly, "What is your proposition?"

"Meaning?"

"That no man, no matter what his age, wants his ear cut off. The left or the right. M. Durobat, I am sure, was in a reasonable frame of mind. You were a long time with him and when you appeared you had a tiny smile in the corner of your lips. It is there still. Your proposition, Elise."

"You are very clever, Kyro," said Elise.

"And you are very beautiful, Elise. Tell me what you plan."

"It might be a little dishonest."

"Admirable."

"And involve betraying your friends."

"Excellent."

"Paul will be heartbroken."

"He will get over it."

"We should have to become equal partners."

"Sweet... It is my ambition. Explain."

"You have the key of the safe?"

"Of course." He patted a pocket.

"You would be waiting by the little cove in an hour with one hundred thousand francs?"

"Nothing easier. I see a whole new life opening before me."

"Us."

"A thousand apologies. Us."

"I have a check..." For a moment Elise's hand slipped inside the front of her blouse and a piece of paper was waved like the flight of a large blue butterfly in front of Gringo's nose. "... for one hundred thousand francs, drawn by M. Durobat on a Marseilles bank. We could have it cashed before midday."

"Charming! Superb! I see a golden future for us." Gringo stretched out his arms for her, but Elise slipped aside gently.

"Let us not rush the preliminaries, Kyro. Our feet must first be firmly on the pathway to the golden future. In an hour at the little cove. *Entendu?*"

"I shall be there." He beamed at her. "Ah, what an object lesson this will be to André never to trust anyone. His father is certainly getting his money's worth."

A few moments later Elise entered Paul's bedroom.

She said triumphantly, "It worked."

"Good," said Paul, and then with a frown asked, "Did he kiss you?"

Elise smiled. "Would it matter?"

"Of course. I've noticed a tendency in you always to overplay a part."

"*Petit cochon*... I like you to be jealous. But enough. In one hour. You must now get into your M. Durobat clothes. The moment we get rid of Gringo we drive to the convent and give Sister Thérèse the money—"

"And then heigh-ho for Paris!" Paul suddenly grabbed her by the waist and swung her around. "You know," he said as he kissed her and set her down. "I've a feeling that we should open an antique shop in Paris. Those little Hermes figures of yours would go very well, and maybe—"

Elise put her hand on his mouth. "In Paris we work and live honestly."

"Sure," said Paul. "We get our feet firmly on the golden pathway to an honest future." He grinned.

"Ah, so—you were watching and listening from the window. *Ma foi*. I can see that I shall have a jealous husband."

"Jealous of every hair on your head, every word you say to another." He kissed her again. "You're wonderful. What an object lesson you will be to André—and Gringo—never to trust a woman . . ."

There was no trouble at all. Gringo, a symphony in dove-gray, was waiting at the roadside by the cove. Elise drew up in Paul's car and he got in alongside her.

"You have the money?" she asked.

"Of course."

"Show."

Gringo chuckled. "A woman after my own heart. What poise, what lack of trust, what perfect understanding . . . We shall travel far."

He pulled a thick packet of banknotes from his inside coat.

"You've got it wrong," said Paul, rising from under a dust sheet in the back of the car. "You're not traveling any distance."

Gringo half turned, saw M. Durobat towering above him, and then a rubber blackjack hit him behind the ear and the subsequent proceedings no longer interested him.

"You know," said Paul as he and Elise lifted Gringo out and deposited him beneath a clump of pines, "I've never used one of those things before. They

really work. I suppose I haven't killed him."

Gringo groaned and above the wash of the sea they heard him, deep in coma, say, "Sweet . . ."

"Count the money," said Elise as they got back into the car and began to drive off. It was all there.

But when they got to the orphanage they couldn't find Sister Thérèse. In fact, they couldn't find anyone but the lodge-keeper and he told them that the whole orphanage had gone off that morning for its annual outing to a small town in the hills about twenty miles inland.

"Of course," said Paul to Elise as they left the place, "I should have remembered. I gave Sister Thérèse a donation for the outing a week ago. Well, there's nothing to do but drive up there. It's on the way to Paris—"

"But what about all my things?"

"Your brother can bring them later. We can't hang about this town. Just think what will happen when Gringo recovers."

He started the car and began to drive out of town. As he went he sang happily and Elise drew close to him and contemplated blissfully the years that lay ahead of her, listening to his tuneless singing.

They couldn't know it, of course, but the trouble was not to come from Gringo. It was to come from a quite different quarter.

Half an hour after they had left the villa, Mme. Fouret arrived in a taxi from the station. She had left her sister comfortably installed at Aix-les-bains. She found André and M. Plume playing billiards and at once light warfare broke out between them. She refused to believe that such types could be guests of M. Paul. And M. Paul couldn't be found.

"We're working with him," said André, conscious of unwanted responsibility and trying to remember all his lessons. "But I don't see where you figure."

"Maybe she's his mother," said M. Plume.

But before the scene could really develop and put André right out of his depths there was an interruption—a short, dapper, elderly figure in a white suit and a bad temper.

"Mme. Fouret!" he shouted. "What the devil goes on here? Strange servants, a man staggering about my drive, who looks as though he's drunk and says he's a guest here—and these." He glared at André and M. Plume through his monocle.

"Monsieur le Comte," said Mme. Fouret faintly.

And it was—Comte d'Auxier—unexpectedly back from America and already confusedly aware that things were not right.

M. Plume, taking over Gringo's role manfully, said, "André, when a situation is confused and trouble brews, retire from it."

They both slipped out while the Count was still bellowing and dancing round the room. Half an hour later the situation was less confused. The police in town were seeking M. Paul Ashcroft, impostor, and already the information had come to hand that M. Ashcroft's car had been seen heading out of town on the Paris road. A police car was soon following it. And following the police car was Comte d'Auxier with Mme. Fouret.

"This man," fumed the Count, "he uses my house, he sleeps in my bed, he drinks my drink—"

"Oh, no, monsieur. He ordered his own—"

"He's a rogue!"

"He had such nice manners—and so English."

"Never trust the English!" the Count stormed.

And ahead of them the police radio car, with a couple of motorcyclists preceding it, was picking up messages from headquarters as the progress of

Paul's car was relayed to it.

And away ahead of them all, Paul and Elise were just driving into the little town of Col-des-Pins with its pine trees and its waterfalls, its grotto and the cool tree-shaded pleasure gardens where the orphans under the care of Sister Thérèse were filling the resin-scented air with happy shouts.

To make the day a superlatively happy one for Sister Thérèse she suddenly looked up and saw M. Durobat coming across the pine needles toward her. He was smiling and waving his silver-headed cane to some of the children who had recognized him.

"They are always so glad to see you, monsieur," said Sister Thérèse.

"Sister," Monsieur Durobat raised his hat, gave her a little bow, and then handing a small brown paper packet to her, said, "I am on my way back to Paris. But before I leave . . . Well, Sister, there is no need for a long speech . . ."

And there wasn't because Sister Thérèse, the packet in her hand, was well able to recognize the crisp crackle that came from it.

"For the baths and the kitchens, Sister, and for the children."

"Ah, monsieur—"

"Not a word more."

M. Durobat bowed again and then was moving away through the pines. Sister Thérèse opened the packet and with shaking fingers began to count the banknotes . . .

Back in the car Elise said to Paul, "And now?"

"Into the town. There is a little hotel in the main square. I shall change there and then we will be on our way. This is goodbye to M. Durobat."

"After a time you will not miss him, I promise," said Elise.

Paul gave her a smile and squeezed her hand.

It was a wide cool square, lined with acacia trees and surrounded by pink and white buildings, a couple of cafés, a barber shop, a urinoir, and the Hotel des Pins. In the center of the square was a large fountain, and a statue of some obscure French politician on which pigeons roosted.

Paul parked the car outside the hotel. Leaving Elise, he took his suitcase from the trunk compartment and went into the hotel.

He booked a room with a bath and a few minutes later was happily peeling off the beard and disguise of M. Durobat. In a little while he would walk out into the cool square, Paul Ashcroft for good, ready to face the world with Elise on his arm. With a girl like

Elise it shouldn't be hard to live almost as honestly as any other man. Anyway, a price had to be paid for happiness—and a family, apparently.

Down below, Elise, bored with sitting in the car, got out and strolled across the square. On the far side was a little wooden gateway and a path through some pines. At the side of the gate was a notice extolling the beauties of a natural grotto. Some cyclists came racing up to the gate as she stood there. They propped their bicycles together, and, chattering like a flock of starlings, swept through the gate in a flurry of long bare legs and brief shorts.

She began to stroll back across the square. She was happy. Not simply because she was in love and going to be married. One needed more than that. She had a man who needed changing. She would make a new man of Paul—an honest man. It was the kind of work every woman relished. He needed a firm hand. She had one. She had two. Long, shapely, pretty hands—but firm.

And then the cool peaceful square suddenly erupted. One minute the dogs were sleeping happily in the sunshine by the fountain and a few people were lazily sipping drinks under the red and yellow and green and

blue awnings, and the next—a volcano, a noisy, colorful turmoil.

A police car came sweeping into the square. Motorcycles were roaring. Another car appeared, its horn blowing furiously to clear a growing crowd.

And all at once there were shouts, cries, arms waving in the air, children running, shopkeepers at their doors, and the pigeons going up from the statue in a great *clack clack* of wings.

And the vortex of it all was Paul's car outside the hotel.

A policeman shouted, "*Ou est-il? Ce monsieur anglais?*"

"His car! His car!" From Mme. Fouret.

"He slept in my bed! The scoundrel! Arrest him!" From the Count.

"Impossible, monsieur le Comte, until we find him," from the police.

"What is it?"

"*Qu'est-ce que c'est?*"

"Who is it?"

"He is English. A crook."

"Ah, the English. Vive la France!"

"Where is he?"

The question was answered by Mme. Fouret.

"There he is!" she cried and pointed to the top of the steps running up to the hotel door. And the moment she had

shouted she regretted it, for at heart she was very fond of Paul. But it was too late.

Paul stood at the top of the steps. He wore a straw boater, a neat gray suit, and a bow tie as bright as a tropical butterfly. One hand rested lightly on the silver head of a walking stick. He was whistling gently. The day was fine, the sky was blue—and Life, he was thinking, was good.

The thought lasted exactly three seconds.

A crowd of people rushed up the steps toward him, a crowd headed by three policemen, the Count, and Mme. Fouret, and followed by a fine old ragtag and bobtail of law-abiding citizens determined to miss no fun, though they were far from clear what it was all about.

"Assassin!"

"Voleur!"

"Perfidious Englishman!"

"Monstre!"

And somewhere faint in the roar the chirp of a young girl who sold souvenirs in the gift shop by the grotto, "But he is charming..."

Paul saw Mme. Fouret and the Count and (recalling a photograph of the Count he had seen in the villa) his mind signaled, "All is discovered." He began to run to the left along the terrace that fronted the hotel.

And from the middle of the square, helpless, Elise watched him go. She had found love, she thought with anguish, only to see it torn to pieces before her eyes by an angry crowd.

She started after the crowd, her dark eyes blazing, and picking up Paul's stick which he had dropped she knew that unless a miracle happened she was going to be arrested for striking a policeman. However ... maybe they would let her and Paul share the same cell.

But Paul, heavy though the odds were against him, had no intention of going to prison. He vaulted over the end of the terrace into the square and slipped through pavement tables and into a café. As he went through, the proprietress screamed at him. Going out of the rear door he heard the crowd crash into the place like a tidal wave.

He ran down the back of some houses, chose a door, and found himself racing through a barber shop to the square again. He had a quick glimpse of a half-lathered face, saw a razor brandished, heard a cry of "Marthe, check the till. We've been robbed!" and he was out into the square.

Behind him there was another roar and then the sound of glass breaking and chairs being overturned. He

headed across the square knowing that it was no good to take to open country. He had to find a place to hide. Otherwise, no Elise, no Paris, no family . . .

He slipped through the gift shop, raced along the side of a stream, swung left down an alley, ducked between the cars in a garage, and came out opposite the urinoir. And wherever he went the crowd thundered after him, not gaining but not losing on him, and spreading destruction and chaos in its wake. Within ten minutes Paul was hot and almost breathless, and one third of the buildings around the square had suffered.

Then, as Paul came charging around the corner of a little church, he saw Sister Thérèse, indifferent to all the noise and disturbance, walking calmly up the steps of the hotel. In that moment the obvious idea for salvation came to him.

He headed across the square, gained ten yards on his nearest pursuer, and was up the steps like a bounding gazelle.

He flashed by Sister Thérèse in the hall and went up the stairs three at a time. As he turned into the corridor where his room was, he heard the crowd surge into the hotel below like a noisy riptide, and he felt the thunder of feet send

a vast tremble through the building.

By the time he reached the door of his room he was already undressing, one hand ripping off his bow tie, the other sending his boater skimming through the window at the far end of the passage.

In his room he slammed and locked the door behind him and jumped for M. Durobat's clothes and make-up which he had left there. Paul had made quick changes before but never one as quick as this. At the end of most of his operations he had been forced to change quickly and move on, but this time—Nemesis was even closer on his heels.

He could hear the yelling of voices and the slamming of doors as the search swept through the floor below his, and then as he fixed his beard and tidied his black cravat and kicked his own clothes under the bed he heard the thud of feet on the stairway.

He went to the door and stepped out. The tide swept down on him, led by the Count and a policeman. The Count skidded to a stop before Paul and cried, "Monsieur, you have seen a young Englishman up here?"

"An Englishman?"

"Yes—a thief, an impostor—"

"He wears a bow tie and a straw hat, monsieur!" panted the policeman.

"Ha . . ." Paul's eyes brightened. "That is the young man. He came charging through my room, messieurs, like a veritable holocaust—no, I mean whirlwind—and out on to the balcony. I was coming to complain. After all, I am an old man and have come here for some peace, some rest—"

But he was talking to himself. The crowd was roaring by him into the room. M. Durobat turned and went quietly to the head of the stairs.

He went down them slowly and in the hall he met Sister Thérèse on her way out. She greeted him with a warm smile.

"I have just telephoned my convent, monsieur, to give them the good news. But tell me, monsieur, what is all that goes on here?"

"It is nothing, Sister. Some local custom, no doubt."

He paused at the bottom of the steps and bowed to her.

"Goodbye, Sister."

She nodded her old apple head and beamed.

"Goodbye, monsieur. But surely you are not a bicyclist at your age?"

M. Durobat chuckled. Standing at the pavement's edge was Elise between two bicycles which she had taken from outside the grotto.

"Indeed I am, Sister. My heart is young, and each day I take bicycling exercises with my niece here."

He took a bicycle, gave a little run, and hopped into the saddle. Elise followed him and the two began to pedal across the square, their pace increasing with each moment they left the hotel farther behind.

Sister Thérèse watched them benevolently. From inside the hotel a babble of sound was still going on. From the far side of the square came the gay and curiously young whistling of M. Durobat, telling the world that it still owed him a living—and, unless he could wriggle out of it, he was going to make it honestly with the young girl at his side.



Allen Kim Lang

Murder in a Nudist Camp

The title of this story speaks for itself—but don't jump to conclusions. Neither Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine nor ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGIES has changed its editorial policy . . . You will find this a most engaging story . . .

Detective: SERGEANT EDWARD ROLFE

WITH ONE BROWN knee folded over the other like the knot in a pretzel, Professor Amos Cooney sprawled in his canvas chair, watching his wife's knitting needles chew orange and black yarns into the scarf he'd unwrap, with cries of delight, on his 75th birthday dinner. Already, Professor Cooney observed with some trepidation, his neckpiece was six feet long and wide enough to conceal the Notre Dame backfield.

With a slight shudder he brought his mind back to the business at hand—the death of the manager of the PennyWise Supermarket. "We'll send flowers in the name of the Club," he said. "Mr. King often assisted me when I visited his store to buy our groceries."

Spread out on cotton blankets and beach towels, and

oiled like a school of Channel swimmers, lay the other members of the Spice Pond Swimming Club—a euphemism for what could more accurately be called the Spice Pond Nudist Camp. The newspaper which told of King's death—one week after the \$40,000 robbery during which he'd been shot—was crumpled beside Anne Anders' elbow. "He was always so cheerful," she mused. "He'd come bouncing into the bank half an hour before the regular opening time, tell me how much money he wanted in each denomination, then chatter and kid with me so that I usually had to count it out three times. Probably I was the last person to see Mr. King before he was shot—except the murderers, of course. I visited him—Mr. King, I mean—at the hospital, but he never regained consciousness."

"And now he's dead," Frank Ferguson said. "The police aren't looking for thieves—now they're looking for a pair of murderers."

"They'll never find 'em," Jason Bailey, the newest member of the Nudist Camp, predicted. "Those eye masks—"

"Half masks, or dominoes," Professor Cooney murmured.

"—made a good disguise," Bailey continued, wagging his red beard. "The thieves were never identified, so they probably will never be caught. Darned shame, too."

"Forty thousand bucks will take two men a long way from Pottawattomie, Indiana, in a week," Frank Ferguson, Jr., thirteen years old, observed. "I'll bet they don't even know that Mr. King died today—or care."

"They'll find out," Professor Cooney said, "when a policeman tells them. Meanwhile, ladies and gentlemen, we have a less serious matter to consider. According to Miss Toffler, our camp had an uninvited visitor this morning."

Mary Cooney looked up from her endless scarf. "What did he look like, Tina?"

"A little man with a face like a fist, all chin and nose and forehead," Miss Toffler said.

"When was this?" Frank Ferguson asked.

"Early." Tina propped her sunglasses up on her forehead, revealing a pair of brown and sincere eyes. "I woke up about five thirty. This is my first day of vacation, and I didn't want to waste a minute of sunlight. I've gotten pretty pale over the winter. Anyway, I went to the kitchen to fill the percolator and plug it in. Then I ran down here to the pond for an eye-opener swim. I was about halfway when I saw this fellow in khaki trousers, heavy shoes, a light jacket, and a red cap. He was skulking over by the entrance road, as if he were waiting for someone."

"My goodness," Anne Anders said. "Anybody should be ashamed to be wearing all those clothes on such a beautiful spring day."

"Maybe he was," Tina said. "The instant he saw me he took off behind the toolshed. I ran to wake up Jason and Professor Cooney, and they tried to find the man."

"I ran all the way to the entrance gate," Amos Cooney said, scratching at a fresh briar-scratch on his right thigh. "The electric lock hadn't been tampered with, and the gate was closed. Meanwhile Jason searched the buildings, but there was no sign of our guest. Tell them what else you saw, Tina."

"I swam across the pond and back," she said. "When I stepped out onto the beach to get my towel, I looked up toward the highway and saw a flash of light—like the reflection off the lens of a telescope or a pair of binoculars. I dropped the towel and jumped right back into the pond."

"Modest girl," the Professor said. He drew back his feet to make way for tanned four-year-olds, the Ferguson twins, scampering by in chase of their ragged puppy. The trio splashed into the shallows of Spice Pond, yipping in fine disregard of their elders. "I would guess that our spy perched himself on the scaffolding of the billboards beside the highway, the only vantage point from which one can peer into our camp," Cooney added.

"We can't allow that sort of thing," Frank Ferguson said. He was father to six of the children who shouted and jumped around them, and of a seventh held in Frances' arms beside him. "What would happen if this spy had a camera with him, one with telephoto lens?"

"Doom," Jason Bailey boomed over his beard.

"My goodness," Anne Anders whispered. Her blush slipped over her face and down her body like a pink shift. "What would Mr. Mueller, the

chief cashier, say if someone showed him a picture of me dressed like this?"

"First 'Wow!'—then 'You're fired!'" Jason Bailey guessed. He smoothed his mustache into line with his beard, gazing up toward the trees that screened the grounds of the Spice Pond Nudist Camp (Swimming Club) from the public highway.

"I'd be out of a job faster than you can say 'Unemployment Compensation,'" Frank Ferguson said. "Pictures of me and Frances and the kids romping around *au naturel* out here would be held incompatible with the dignity expected of the manager of the Pottawattomie office of the State Employment Service. Our legislators are pretty square."

Professor Cooney tossed a pebble out into the pond, splashing the flailing pup. "It is deplorable that we lack the freedom our friends on the continent enjoy," he said. "In England, Germany, Finland, nudism is no more looked down on than stamp collecting. Our problem simply proves that we have years to spend yet, educating our fellow Americans on the naturist way of life."

"We haven't got years, Professor," Frances Ferguson pointed out. "Frank and I have a two-week vacation, which I'd just as soon not waste chasing

off a Peeping Tom." Her slim body, flecked with cinnamon freckles, belied her status as a seven-times mother—although the baby in her arms, whose diaper made him overdressed in this company, helped remind them.

"I say, let's call the police," Tina Toffler said.

"They'd only tell us to put on pants," Jason Bailey growled. "You know how they treated folks caught wearing monokinis on Chicago beaches, those topless bathing suits? Well, they'd be even less sympathetic toward all of us in nokinis."

"We have a trespasser," Cooney said. "I will refer to him as Mr. Peeper." He sprang up from his canvas chair to pace the sand in his splayed bare feet, very much the popular image of the absent-minded professor, one who'd gone directly from the shower room to the classroom. "Our problem is to utilize Mr. Peeper's psychological moment to our advantage."

"Psychological moment?" Anne Anders asked, wrinkling her nose. "Gee whiz, Professor. Now is the moment."

"The phrase, my dear, refers not to time but to leverage," Amos Cooney lectured. He turned to one side as though expecting to find a blackboard

behind him, his fingers pinched as though he were holding a piece of chalk. "It is an engineering term that we scientists of the mind have borrowed. You suggest, Miss Toffler, that we call the police. I counter with the proposal that we cause Mr. Peeper, himself, to call the police."

"Dearest, you're getting awfully pedantic," Mary Cooney observed, looking up from her Halloween-colored scarf.

"To be brief, then, for brevity is the soul of wit," Cooney said, flashing a grin toward his wife, "I propose that we put on a one-act playlet for a one-man audience. No ordinary play, my friends. A murder."

"We've had our murder in Pottawattomie," Jason Bailey said. "It's not presently a popular sport."

"Bear with me," Cooney said, pacing again, one finger held alongside his nose. "We have a voyeur in the billboards, a fellow spying on our innocent amusements through guilty opera glasses—or even, as Mr. Ferguson suggests, through the viewfinder of an unauthorized camera. So? So we give him a real show, a plot to shake him more deeply than even the sight of our lovely Tina, here, or Anne, or Frances, or my Mary's maturer charms. We commit a

murder for him to see and report."

Jason Bailey leaned back on his elbows, laughing. "A murder? Who's going to volunteer to get himself killed?"

"I will," Frank Ferguson said. "Perhaps a clean-living young architect like you never heard of the old badger game, Jason. Here's how it works. You come storming up to me aiming a pistol loaded with blanks, waving it and threatening to blow my head off. I back up, protesting innocence. You draw a bead and fire. I slap a handful of ketchup, held ready for that purpose, to my chest. *Ka-pow! Splat! Argh!* I stumble backwards, gory with tomato sauce, and fall lifeless to the sand."

"You've been reading our comic books, Dad," Junior Ferguson said.

Jason Bailey stood up and bored a toe into the sand. "You teach psychology, Professor Cooney, but I think you're wrong if you think Mr. Peeper will be persuaded to run to the cops. He'd just run. At most, he'd phone in an anonymous tip. Why should a man admit to the Pottawattomie police that he's been sneaking telescopic peeks at our pretty girls in their birthday suits?"

"Because of Mr. King's murder," Amos Cooney said.

"Mr. Peeper, filled for the moment with a citizen's urge to improve the public peace—and morals—will be driven toward us, not away."

"We've got to try something," Tina Toffler said. "Maybe the Spice Pond Swimming Club is everything it says on our membership form—The Midwest's Oldest, Newest Nature Camp; but to outsiders, nudism means revels, Roman orgies, and wickedness. We've got to preserve our privacy or we'll lose our Club."

"My goodness," Anne Anders said. "If I knew that photographs of me were being passed around in Pottawattomie bars and locker rooms, I'd just die! I really would. I'd have to leave home. My family would never understand—especially Daddy. I could talk till I was blue in the face about the philosophical, psychological, and physiological values of sun culture, the way Professor Cooney does, but Daddy would just blush and disown me."

"What we should do," Jason Bailey announced, lending his statement all the authority of his jutting chin and beard, "is to sneak up to that billboard, grab hold of Mr. Peeper, and bust him one in the mouth. Professor Cooney, you're the Club's president and a teacher, but you just don't know how to

handle sneaky characters."

"I prefer," Amos Cooney said, "finesse to fist-in-the-face."

"Prof, the cops are busy," Jason went on. "They're trying to get a lead on those two guys in Lone Ranger masks who shot Mr. King. Now, do you think they'll be amused when they come howling up here to catch another murderer and we tell 'em it was all a charade planned to trap a Peeping Tom? Just you see. They'll order us all into ankle-length Mother Hubbards."

"Don't be stubborn, Jason," Frances Ferguson said. "It can't do any harm for you to 'murder' Frank, and it might solve our problem."

"I'll get the ketchup, Dad," Frank Junior volunteered. He raced toward the kitchen door of the Spice Pond clubhouse, leaping across the canvas-covered rotisserie en route.

"Who's got a gun?" Amos Cooney inquired.

"The twins' cowboy outfits are in the back seat of our station wagon," Frances Ferguson said.

"Do they go bang?" Anne Anders asked.

"They go bang and they smoke and look lethal enough to concern the U.S. Disarmament Commission," Mrs. Ferguson assured the girl. "For

seven-ninety-eight, plus tax, they'd better show some action."

Young Frank trotted back to the pond with a squeeze bottle of ketchup concealed from the Peeper in a folded dishtowel. "That's fine," his father said. "Now we'll have to make certain our watcher is on post up in his billboard."

Amos Cooney gazed over his spectacles at the three younger women. "Ladies, if you'll saunter toward the clubhouse like pedestrian Ladies Godiva, I'm sure you'll catch our voyeur's eye. Frank, keep a careful watch out toward the highway. Don't look directly at Mr. Peeper—we don't want to frighten him off."

Anne Anders sat quite still, her knees hunched up to her chin. "I don't think I can do it," she said. "Being spied on makes my flesh creep. If Mr. Peeper is so interested in naturism, why doesn't he just join the Spice Pond Swimming Club. There's plenty of sun for one more member."

"Think, Miss Anders, think!" Professor Cooney said. "A person must demonstrate excellent moral character to become a member of our little society. Correct? Mr. Peeper is not a person of good moral character. Therefore, he must spy on us, condemned forever

to be an outsider, a looker-in upon our gentle revels. Until—" he pinched off his spectacles and wagged them at her "—until we bring him in here and prove the wholesomeness of the nudist way, of the sunlit path to health."

Jason Bailey grunted, still unconvinced. "I'd a lot rather ease up through the woods as I said, catch the guy, and make him eat his camera or telescope or whatever. He could put your ketchup on 'em, Frank."

Tina Toffler tapped her sunglasses down into place on her nose. "Here we go," she said, grabbing the reluctant Anne Anders' arm. "Frances, give Frank the baby." The three women walked toward the clubhouse, as tense as though children were following them with snowballs.

"He's there!" young Frank whispered. "I saw something move—and a glint of light."

"Good," Professor Cooney said. He rubbed his hands together. "Thus the white mouse enters our maze."

"Amos," Mary Cooney observed, taking scissors to the two balls of yarn and ending her birthday scarf at last, "sometimes you act all of ten years old."

"Practical psychology, my dear, is my passion," the Professor said. "Mr. Bailey, if

you'll get one of those toy pistols from the Ferguson automobile, we'll hit the boards with our little farce."

Frank Ferguson, preparing his prop, squirted a handful of ketchup into his right palm.

"Understand," Jason Bailey said, "I'm playing this role under protest. If your amateur theatricals turn out to be a turkey, don't blame the man who's playing the heavy." He got up and walked around the canvas-covered rotisserie—a plastic bubble in which one could sunbathe in the coldest weather—toward the parking lot.

"I suggest we adjourn to the infants' wading pool, up the hill," Amos Cooney said. "It will serve as a stage easily visible from Mr. Peeper's billboard balcony."

"Theater in the round is all the rage nowadays," Frank Ferguson remarked. He looked down into his ketchup-filled hand. "However our audience reacts," he said, "I'm a cinch to be hit with tomato."

"Everybody be casual," Cooney cautioned his amateur troupe. "If the other Club members, over on the volleyball court and in the pond, don't realize what's going on, they'll act even more realistically. Frank, you be especially careful not to smile."

"I'm a Method Actor," the victim designate said. "I'm thinking of all the things in my past that should have got me shot, and didn't. The thought will keep me properly grim." They walked up beside the wading pool. "Here comes my nemesis," Ferguson said.

Approaching the water-filled rubber doughnut in which the Club's babies dunked were Tina Toffler and Jason Bailey. Chasing Bailey was Tommy Ferguson, the right-handed twin, screaming that the red-bearded man had stolen his pistol. Pure ham all the way, Bailey held the toy gun down by his right side, his face screwed up in an expression of insane anger. "One of us," he shouted, stepping over four-year-old Linda Walters, who was up to her navel in mudpies, "has got to go!"

"No, Jason!" Tina screamed, seizing his gun hand.

"It's too late now to stop me," Bailey yelled. He lifted the gun. "Take that, Ferguson, you rat!"

The toy gun behaved with all the vigor that the television advertisements of it had promised. *Crash! Twang-whoee!* Smoke curled out of the muzzle. Little Tommy danced around Bailey's knees, crying that he wanted his gun back.

Frank Ferguson slapped his

right, or ketchup, hand to his chest, leaped into the air, landed to reel about on one heel, his head back and his arms spread, then fell backward into the wading pool, narrowly missing young Miss Walters, who was washing off her mud shovel.

"Help!" Professor Cooney shouted. "Frank has been shot!"

Bill Walters, one of the nudists not in on the plot, ran up to grab Jason Bailey around the throat and shake him till the gun dropped to the ground. "You trying to give nudism a bad name?" he demanded.

"It's just a toy, Bill, but don't let on," Bailey said.

"What are you nuts up to, Jason?" Walters asked.

"Trot me into the clubhouse, under the gun," Bailey instructed him. "I'll explain everything inside."

"The way everybody's acting, somebody must have spiked the breakfast coffee," Walters said. "Okay, Bailey. March. Don't try any tricks, or I'll blow a hole right through your picture tube."

His hands held high, Bailey allowed himself to be herded into the clubhouse, out of Mr. Peeper's sight. "It's always the man with the beard who's cast as the villain," he grumbled.

Frank Ferguson lay in the

wading pool, only his knees visible over the rubber wall. Linda Walters peered down at him. "Big people supposed to swim in the pond," she pointed out.

"Go away, Linda," Ferguson muttered.

"All right." The youngster waddled off to retrieve her bucket, then hurried into the clubhouse to catch the rest of the show.

Frank Junior trotted out with a chair on his head. "Help me, Professor Cooney," he shouted. Together, the director of the play and young Ferguson lifted the temporary corpse onto the chair and bore it between them like a palanquin, dripping ketchup, into the clubhouse's kitchen door.

Ferguson washed off the rest of the ketchup at the sink. "Now we've got to wait, sweating out the reviews," he said.

"We wait," Cooney agreed. He walked over to the stove, lifted the lid from a bubbling kettle, and sniffed. "Fortunately, it is nearly lunchtime, as this splendid-smelling pepperpot soup the ladies have prepared reminds me," he said. His spectacles steamed up, so the Professor stepped back from the stove.

"It doesn't seem right, our feeding our faces while poor

Frank Ferguson's body's growing cold," Tina Toffler remarked, placing a plate on the table before the corpse.

"Don't write me off before I've had a second helping," Ferguson said. "Dying is hard work. Please pass the coffee."

A telephone jangled out on the sundeck. "The gate phone!" Cooney exulted, jumping to his feet. He'd been trying on the orange-and-black scarf for size. One end nearly tripped him as he ran to grab the phone off its cradle. "Yes?" The answer caused Cooney to muffle the mouthpiece with the tail of his scarf. "It worked!" he shouted. "This is Sergeant Rolfe calling, of the Pottawattomie Police. He wants to come in."

"So push the gate button, Professor," Jason Bailey suggested.

"Of course." Cooney leaned on the button, then spoke into the phone. "Open the gate while the buzzer's sounding, Sergeant, and please remember to close it after you."

Frank Ferguson pushed back his plate, gulped a mouthful of coffee, and stood up. "Visitors coming!" he shouted. "Everybody get into formal dress."

"Darn," said one of the teen-aged boys, shoveling a last forkful into his mouth. "Ever'thin' will get cold." He ran with the others to the men's

locker room to put on swim trunks. The girls and women scampered to their lockers on the far side of the sundeck, to return adjusting shorts and halters that could pass muster on the most conservative public beach.

Sergeant Rolfe, tall and lean as a Texan's notion of a Texan, stopped his sand-colored police sedan before the clubhouse. He got out to gaze around the playground above Spice Pond. Professor Cooney, wearing the ragged khaki trunks that had seen scant service during his sixty years in the naturist movement, trotted out to greet the policeman.

"Welcome to the Spice Pond Swimming Club, Sergeant," he said, holding out his hand. "I'm Amos Cooney."

"Of course you are, Professor," Sergeant Rolfe said, shaking the old man's hand. "I took your course in Abnormal Psychology three years ago."

"I remember, Edward," the Professor said. "You made good grades, too."

"Perhaps abnormal psychology might help me understand the events of a few minutes ago," Rolfe suggested, following Cooney into the clubhouse. "Where is the man who was so unconvincingly shot to death?"

"Up and about, able to take

nourishment," Frank Ferguson said. He introduced himself to Rolfe, then demanded, "What do you mean, so unconvincingly?"

"A man who's been shot dead seldom leaps in an entrechat, twirls like a drunken dervish, and goes down cutting didoes like a cat on hot bricks," the Sergeant said. "In my experience, such a victim says 'Oof!' and collapses."

"Perhaps I overacted a bit," Ferguson admitted reluctantly. "I'll bear your criticism in mind for our next production."

"If you'd care to take lunch with us, Sergeant, I'll explain what your informant saw and ask a favor of you," Amos Cooney said.

"Coffee would be welcome," Rolfe agreed. He walked into the dining hall and allowed himself to be introduced to the few members of the Spice Pond Swimming Club he didn't already know. Then he sat down and cuddled his hands around a coffee cup to hear Professor Cooney's story.

"You see," Amos Cooney began, "we've been bothered by a trespasser."

"A fellow about five-feet-three, wearing highlaced boots, light brown trousers, a faded blue jacket, and a red cap," Sergeant Rolfe specified. "Right?"

"And a face like a fist," Tina Toffler added.

"That's my man," Rolfe said.

"You've seen him?" Frank Ferguson demanded.

"Not since early this morning," the policeman said. He savored the coffee. "What was your little demonstration out by the wading pool supposed to accomplish, Professor?"

"I told them it was silly," Jason Bailey said.

"Our efforts have borne fruit," Professor Cooney pointed out. "Our purpose, Edward my boy, was to motivate Mr. Peeper—the fellow in the red cap, who scurried from the camp only to perch in the billboards with binoculars—to motivate him to call the police. When you got here, Sergeant, we intended to inquire of you who had reported the supposed murder. Knowing who Mr. Peeper was, we could then persuade him to respect our privacy. I fully expected your witness to come with you."

"You haven't seen him?"

"I saw him about six o'clock this morning," Tina Toffler said. "He was standing by the entrance road. When he saw me, he ran and hid."

"His name," Rolfe said, "is Boots MacClure. Last night he told a bartender that he had a fortune at his fingertips. The

bartender told me. Bearing in mind Mr. MacClure's arrest record, I determined to follow him to his fortune. It seemed possible that he was one of the two masked gunmen who shot Mr. King at the PennyWise Supermarket last week, and made off with forty thousand dollars. I trailed MacClure here to the camp, early this morning. He came in and he hasn't left. Professor Cooney, with your permission, I'll inspect the grounds. MacClure is here somewhere."

"I'll come along," Jason Bailey volunteered. "You may need help."

"Glad to have you, Mr. Bailey," Sergeant Rolfe said.

The touring policeman viewed the kids' wading pool, went down to Spice Pond to stare into the clear water that might be hiding the wanted man's body, walked north to the gulch where the railroad bounded the camp, and searched the woods by the highway.

"No sign of him," Jason Bailey said. "He probably sneaked out."

"I think not," the sergeant said. "Let's look in the toolshed, and then explore your clubhouse. Boots MacClure is here, I'm certain."

MacClure didn't seem to be. He wasn't hiding in the coffin-sized box where the

camp's croquet equipment was stored, or crouched by the garbage disposal unit under the sink, nor did MacClure occupy the narrow crawl space under the clubhouse. Rolfe finally stopped beside the rotisserie, covered through the spring and summer with canvas.

"It's the rotisserie—a plastic hood," Amos Cooney explained. "Some of our members, wishing to retain their tans through the winter, bask in there, snug as toast."

"It's the only place we haven't searched," Rolfe said. He tugged at the tie ropes and peeled the canvas back from the plastic bubble.

Inside, lying on his face, was Mr. Boots MacClure. The camp's best Swedish-steel carving knife protruded from his ribs.

"Keep the kids away," Sergeant Rolfe said. He knelt to peer through the plastic. "Every minute my hunch looks righter," he murmured. "MacClure was one of the two PennyWise thieves, he came up here to meet his partner, and possibly to collect his half of the loot. King's death had made MacClure nervous—he wanted to get paid off, then cut out."

"So he got paid off and cut up," Jason Bailey said. He stroked his beard with a thoughtful air. "Sergeant, do

you think the robbery money is up here at Spice Pond?"

"I'd be surprised if it weren't," the policeman said. He tugged the canvas back over the rotisserie, concealing the corpse till the coroner could see it. "Let's go inside. I've got to make some phone calls."

"What a horrible thing to happen," Amos Cooney said. "It's a shame one of us didn't find MacClure before he was killed."

"One of you did," Rolfe said. He'd phoned into town for an ambulance, the Pottawatomie Police photographer, and the coroner. "May I have some more coffee?"

"Of course," Anne Anders said. "Too bad that liquor isn't allowed here. Something stronger than coffee might be a comfort."

"It's too bad that murder isn't also off-limits here," Jason Bailey said. He sat down between the policeman and Amos Cooney and pushed his empty cup forward for a refill. "Who was MacClure's partner, the person who killed him?"

"Can't say yet," Rolfe admitted. "The only description we have is that both men wore those oval masks over their eyes—"

"—called dominoes," Professor Cooney insisted. "Originally the word came from the Latin

dominus, or master—a fascinating etymology—”

“Amos,” Mary Cooney cautioned. “You’re being professional.”

“An eye mask,” Sergeant Rolfe said, persisting in his error. “Why not a handkerchief over the nose and mouth?” Anne Anders filled his cup with hot coffee. “Thank you,” the policeman said.

Reaching for his cup, Rolfe bumped it with the back of his hand, slopping the steaming fluid onto the table in front of Jason Bailey who leaped up to keep from being burned. As he rose, Sergeant Rolfe plucked Bailey’s red beard. The policeman was holding the triangle of false hair by the time Jason Bailey got to his feet, barefaced.

Rolfe unfolded from the table and eased his pistol around toward Bailey’s middle. “A domino, as the Professor calls that sort of mask, leaves the chin bare,” he observed. “You shaved for the robbery, having prepared a false mustache and beard to glue on afterwards. Both thieves were barefaced—therefore, bearded and mustached Jason Bailey would never even be suspected.”

The false hair now lay on the table beside Rolfe’s spilled coffee. “There’s no money

here,” Jason Bailey said. Where the spirit gum had pulled free from his chin and upper lip, the skin was red and fuzzy. “MacClure was knifed by another trespasser.”

“I propose,” Amos Cooney said, “once the unfortunate Boots MacClure has been removed, to dig into the ground beneath the rotisserie. The man who hid a corpse there might have used the same deposit-box before.”

“You haven’t got a thing against me, Sergeant,” Jason Bailey went on. “Wearing a false beard is no felony.”

“The same Peeping Tom who so embarrassed Miss Toffler saw Boots MacClure run through the kitchen door,” Rolfe said. “He also saw Professor Cooney take off up the road, and another man, Jason Bailey, go into the clubhouse after MacClure. The Peeping Tom’s testimony will convict you, Bailey.”

Anne Anders was blushing again. “It was you up there in that catbird seat, wasn’t it, Sergeant Rolfe? Not MacClure? My goodness! Watching us run around in no more than a coat of tan—”

The policeman smiled. “My mind was on my work, Miss Anders,” he said. “I’ll admit, however, that I’ve never had a more delightful stakeout.”

Frances and Richard Lockridge

Cat of Dreams

Little Ann's story didn't add up—cats never have red eyes, and even if Ann did see the cat, she didn't see the man running. Bear in mind that Ann was a most imaginative child . . . by the creators of Mr. and Mrs. North . . .

Detective: CAPTAIN M. L. HEIMRICH

ANN NOTSON WAS NINE years old; she had eyes which in certain lights looked green; there was a kind of glow in her soft brown hair. Her mother had had such eyes and hair, and so Philip Notson, when he looked at his daughter, must often—too often—have been reminded of his wife.

Ann Notson was an imaginative child—a “very” imaginative child, her teacher in Van Brunt District School had written, underlining the word “very.” This, decided Captain M. L. Heimrich of the New York State Police, meant that Ann sometimes saw things which were not there or, perhaps, saw what was there in a more interesting form than was entirely real.

There was, however, no doubt of the very ugly reality of what she saw at about eight

thirty of a bright, cold Saturday morning in mid-December—saw behind the garage of her father's house on Brickhouse Road in the town of Van Brunt, County of Putnam. She had gone out of the house to find a “kitty.” “May I be excused, please?” she said to her father, who was lingering over breakfast coffee, as a man may on Saturday morning. “I want to go out and see if the kitty is all right.”

“Um-mm,” Philip Notson said. “Bundle up, kitten.”

He heard the front door slam and stopped, coffee cup halfway between saucer and lips, and expression drained out of his eyes. It was the little, meaningless things which now were the worst things. Jean had always closed doors more firmly than necessary . . . He wrenched his mind away.

What "kitty" did Ann expect to find? A cat of dreams, probably, since they had no cat; a "kitty" who frisked, chased his tail, only in a child's quick mind.

He picked up the newspaper. He made himself read it.

The door slammed again. She hadn't stayed long. No kitty to be found, he supposed. However imaginative a child . . .

"Daddy," Ann said, almost before she was in the dining room. "*Daddy!* There's a man out there. Lying right on the ground. Is he asleep, Daddy? Because it's cold. It's—*awful* cold."

There was urgency in the clear voice; there was something—fear? shock?—in the child's greenish eyes. Philip Notson said, "Where?" and, on being told, went to see. The man who lay on the ground behind the garage, between it and the bank which broke sharply down from the field above, was not asleep.

Captain Heimrich, whose chief concern is with murder, drove up the driveway from Brickhouse Road to Philip Notson's white and gray house at a little after nine. Fortunately he had been nearby.

There were police cars already in the driveway and in the turnaround in front of the

garage. He went around the garage and looked down at the body of Malcolm Arthur Bell.

Just two days before, on Thursday, Heimrich had heard Bell called "a very fortunate man" by County Judge Davies, who had just accepted a verdict of Not Guilty from a jury in the Carmel courthouse. Not guilty, that was, of manslaughter in connection with the death of one Jean Notson, thirty-one years old, at about one thirty-five o'clock on the morning of Sunday, the twenty-first of September. Bell's luck had now run out.

"Oh," Philip Notson said to Heimrich. "I see how it looks. He killed my wife. The jury says he's not guilty of anything. And—I said some bitter things and was heard saying them. I see how it looks. All the same—"

All the same, he knew nothing of Bell's death. Murder, if they were so sure it was that. He himself had thought that Bell had stumbled on the rough steps leading down from the upper field, pitched headlong, and landed on a rock. Which, he said with some savagery, would have been appropriate.

Heimrich, a notably solid man, sat and watched and listened to Philip Notson—a slim, quick man, tall and with just a suggestion of the tall

man's stoop. Notson walked back and forth in the living room and made quick motions with his hands. He was in his middle thirties; his hair was beginning to recede a little; the summer's tan had not quite faded from his mobile face.

"No," Heimrich said, "he didn't fall, Mr. Notson. He was struck. Several times, probably with an iron bar. Sometime yesterday evening. Between five and nine, at a guess—a wide guess, admittedly. He would have come that way, coming here?"

"Across the field? Yes. They used to. He and his wife. Not since Jean died. Since—he killed her."

But it had not been like that—not as Phil Notson said it now, looking down, his eyes angry, at Heimrich. The jury had said it was an accident—an accident in the early hours of a Sunday morning, after a dance.

"Come on and ride in a real car," Mal Bell had said to Jean Notson, a pretty, slender woman in a gray-green party dress, and patted the hood of his sports car. "Just try it and you'll make old stick-in-the-mud get you one."

They had all laughed, not that there was anything especially funny, but because they were young enough, and gay, and had had a good time at

the country club dance.

They had all had drinks, but nobody—and specifically, of course, Malcolm Bell—had had too many. Bell said that it was a blown front tire that sent the hurrying little car into a tree and Jean out of the car—far, far out of it, until a stone fence stopped her diving flight.

"As to yesterday evening. Mr. Notson," Heimrich said. "You got home about when?"

"A little after seven."

Heimrich raised his eyebrows and waited. Van Brunt is an express-train hour from Grand Central. Most commuters manage to make the 5:06.

Notson had missed the usual train, he told Heimrich. He had telephoned Mrs. Billings, who was the housekeeper, and caught the 5:58. Heimrich could ask Mrs. Billings. "Oh," Heimrich said. "Yes, naturally. You came home, had dinner. Then?"

"Read to my daughter. Saw she got to bed—about eight thirty. Read a little longer and went to bed myself. Didn't take time out to kill Mal Bell."

Heimrich said, "Now, Mr. Notson," and then Sergeant Forniss opened the door from the hall and made a motion with his head. Heimrich went out into the hall and closed the door behind him.

A little girl, with very wide

greenish eyes and very soft brown hair, and wearing a snow suit, was sitting on the third step of the stairs which led up from the hall, and looking out through the front door.

Heimrich smiled at her and Ann Notson said, "I saw a man." She had, Heimrich knew. That she would forget seeing him, after time enough, Heimrich hoped. He said, "Yes, dear," and listened to Forniss.

Then he smiled again at the little girl and went back into the living room, and told Philip Notson that the people across the road had seen the floodlight come on at the Notson place about nine o'clock the previous evening, and said that it had stayed on for about a quarter of an hour. Could Mr. Notson—

"Oh," Phil Notson said, and was very quick in speaking. "That. People looking for the Blakes. Live on Van Brunt Lane, the Blakes do. Next road up. They'd turned off too soon. Told them how to get there."

He looked at Heimrich with challenge. Heimrich told Philip Notson that he saw.

"No reason we would have heard anything," Notson said. "Unless Bell shouted. Maybe not even then. We'd have been in the dining room, the kitten—Ann, that is—and I, and Mrs. Billings in the kitchen."

"No," Heimrich said. "Kill-

ing that way doesn't make a lot of noise. Well—"

"You know about the Perkins kid?" Notson said. "What Perkins said he'd do?"

"I know," Heimrich said. "We'll talk to Mr. Perkins."

"Kid of twelve," Notson said. "Crippled now. Who knows when he'll walk again? Because a louse doesn't look where he's going, where he's driving his car. The kid was a pitcher."

"I know," Heimrich said. But he also knew, and supposed that Philip Notson knew—but a bitter mind cannot be predicted—that Bell had not been at fault that time, either; that Jimmy Perkins had been on a bicycle, and had wobbled into the road too far, and that Bell had been driving within the limit, which was forty, through the place they called The Flats, and had done all that could be expected of a driver. (Except, possibly, to drive below the posted speed, which was too high, considering the number of kids, and dogs, on the highway where it ran through The Flats.)

The boy's father, a short and powerfully built man who was a yardman for the Van Brunt Supply Company, had said a lot of things which, it was to be presumed, he hadn't meant. At any rate, that had been a year ago and Perkins had not done

anything. Except, of course, to collect a modest sum—modest since Bell had done all that could, officially, be asked—from Bell's insurance company.

Heimrich said, "Well, thanks, Mr. Notson," and went out into the hall. Forniss raised his eyebrows in inquiry and Heimrich shrugged in answer.

The little girl was still on the third step. She said, "You're a policeman, aren't you?"

"Yes, Ann," Heimrich said and smiled down at the little girl—the pretty little girl who, they said, looked so much like her mother. "I'm a policeman."

"I saw a man," Ann said. "When I turned the lights on. He was running. And a kitty."

"Yes," Heimrich said, but sat down on his heels so that he was level with the little girl. "Running?"

"A funny man," Ann said. "Thick. He ran funny. Why don't you wear clothes like the other policemen?"

Heimrich explained about that. He said, "When did you see the funny man, Ann?"

She had seen him the previous evening. When it was time for Daddy to come home—Mrs. Billings had said he was going to be late, but you couldn't tell—she turned on the floodlights over the garage. "It's my—perogative." She stopped and looked at Heimrich with

doubt. He nodded his head. "Since Mamma went away," Ann said. "So Daddy won't bump into anything."

She had turned the light on at ten minutes after six—"precisely"—and she had seen the funny man running away from the house, toward the road. (He was funny, Heimrich decided, because he was a grown person and was running. Which was quite reasonable.) Ann didn't know who he was. He wasn't Mr. Bell. Of course she knew Mr. Bell. He wasn't Daddy. "Don't be so silly."

"And," Ann Notson said, "there was a kitty. Just where the light stops. It had shiny eyes. Like tail lights."

That was unexpected. In semi-darkness, but with light on them, the eyes of cats shine—shine green, shine yellow.

"Like tail lights?" Heimrich said. "How like tail lights, dear?"

"Red," Ann said. "Red as anything. Like in the fireplace sometimes."

"Oh," Heimrich said. "Did you tell Daddy about the kitty with red eyes? And about the man?"

"Of course," Ann said. "He said I shouldn't make up things. *Everybody* says that." She paused. "All the *time*," she said. "He said cats never have red eyes. But this—"

Heimrich touched the soft brown hair, smiled at her, stood up, and supposed that people did, all the time, tell Ann not to make things up.

A man running.

A red-eyed cat.

For a moment Heimrich wished that, just this once at any rate, a cat's eyes would glow red in semi-darkness, with a light on them, instead of green or yellow; that such a glow, and a man running, would prove not to be merely things a little girl had made up. It would be bad for the soft-haired child if something happened to Daddy...

Things are collected, are put together. This takes time, since the collection must extend to byways. It takes more men than two. A trooper had been sent to talk to James Perkins, and by no means only to carry out Heimrich's assurance to Philip Notson.

Perkins was to be asked—was asked—whether he still had borne a grudge against the man who had maimed his son. He was also to be asked—was asked—where he had been the previous evening... between the hours of five o'clock, say, and nine.

The trooper had found Perkins loading sand into a burlap bag in the yard of the Van Brunt Supply Company.

Perkins stuck his shovel in the sand and said that, hell, he bore no grudge, hadn't since he had had time to think it over. A kid on a bicycle—well, Perkins drove a car himself. Things happen before you know it; things you can't do anything about. Bell had been decent enough about it—or his insurance company had.

As for the previous evening, Perkins had got home from work a little after five, had had dinner around six, and had stayed home until bedtime, looking at TV. And they could ask his wife. His wife had been asked; had said he certainly had. Wives have been known to alibi for husbands. And it could not be denied that Perkins might, by a child, well be called a "thick" man.

But Malcolm Bell's body had not been found in Perkins's back yard. It had been found behind Philip Notson's garage. So Heimrich and Sergeant Forniss concentrated, most logically, on Bell himself and on Philip Notson.

Bell, on the last day of his life, had driven his wife to New York and put her on a plane for Palm Beach. He had driven back and had a drink at the Old Stone Inn, and told a friend he met there he was thinking about going around to see old Phil Notson and try to get

everything straightened out.

Half a dozen men had got off the 5:58 local-express at Van Brunt, and one of them might have been Notson, but they had not proved it by late afternoon.

Nobody had seen Notson on the 5:06, and since that was his regular train he probably would have been noticed and spoken to if he had been on it. Which did not prove much, since the most likely thing was that Notson had turned the garage floodlight on at a little after nine to see who had come to the door and, when he found out, killed him . . .

Nobody had showed up at the Blake house on Van Brunt Lane to say that they had had to stop to ask directions. Of course, the prospective droppers-in might merely have changed their minds . . . Ann's teacher said the poor little thing was a dear, but that she was a *most* imaginative child.

And—the eyes of cats do not shine red when light strikes them out of darkness. Heimrich had been sure of that, but all the same—since a policeman can never be too sure of anything—he had talked to an eye specialist he knew. “Nope,” the ophthalmologist said, “not that I ever heard of. Oh—I suppose an albino cat's might. No pigment on the tapetum lucidum.”

“The what?”

“Layer in the chorioid,” the eye man said. “Back part of the eye. What reflects light. Good many mammals have it. We don't, more's the pity.”

“Are there,” Heimrich asked him, “a great many albino cats?”

“One in a million, at a guess. I never saw one. Never met anybody who has seen one. They'd have pink eyes, of course. White cats with pink eyes.”

A cat like that would be noticeable, Heimrich thought, and he asked around. Nobody had ever seen one. Not around there or anywhere else. So—Ann had not seen a red-eyed cat. A million to one she hadn't. And hence—not a man running, either, since the two things went together—went together in a child's imagination.

Heimrich turned his car off NY 11-F into Brickhouse Road. It was time to get to work on Philip Notson—to get really to work on him. It was dusk by this time.

Heimrich switched the headlights on—and jammed his brakes on; and Sergeant Forniss, sitting beside him, put hands out to brace himself and said, “What the *hell*?”

“Look,” Heimrich said, and they both looked—looked at

two tiny lights by the road's edge; lights which glowed like coals in a fireplace, like the twin tail lights of a car. Red lights.

The little red lights went out. But then they were glowing from the top of a stone fence. They went out again, but by then Heimrich had the car off the road and they were out of it at a driveway.

There was enough light left to see a cat streak toward a house. A woman stood on the porch. The woman called, "*Boots! Here, Boots. Here—*" and then said to the arriving cat, "*You! Again. Again!*"

The woman was Mrs. Burnett—Mrs. Harry Burnett. Of course the cat belonged to her. "Come here, Boots," she said again, and Boots came to prove it.

"Oh," Heimrich said, and looked at Boots, who was certainly not a white cat with pink eyes; he was a cat with a black face and deep blue eyes and a black tail. "Oh," Heimrich said. "Siamese. We were looking for an albino cat." He could not remember that, as a policeman, he had ever made a sillier remark. "A cat with red eyes," he added, and felt sillier than ever, looking down at the blue-eyed cat.

"With red—" Mrs. Burnett said. "Oh—you mean with a

light on them? Of course. They always are. Siamese eyes, I mean. Because Siamese are part albino, you know. Even if you'd never guess it to look at them."

It proved fortunate for Philip Notson—and for a little girl with greenish eyes and an imagination not quite, this time, as fervid as people were always saying—that Boots was a cat who led a somewhat circumscribed life; was a young female who, particularly at the moment, had her own idea about things, and hence was not let roam at large. But a cat who got out anyway, now and again, as she had this Saturday evening, but only for a few minutes.

The night before, however, Boots had got out at five thirty in the evening, Mrs. Burnett confided, and had been gone for an hour or more, and goodness knew where, and one could only hope.

Since two things were linked in the mind of a child, Heimrich and Forniss did not go on to the Notson house, but drove the other way—drove to The Flats and, with not much trouble found a "thick" man standing at the bar of the Three Oaks Tavern.

James Perkins did not seem surprised to see them but then James Perkins was mumbling

drunk now—mumbling drunk.

He mumbled a good deal about a so-and-so who thought he could get away with anything, and about bought-off so-and-so's who would let him. And about that so-and-so Bell, who knew better now, knew you couldn't cripple a kid and get off for a few measly dollars.

Some drunken men talk a lot.

If Perkins talked enough, Heimrich thought; they might never have to ask a little girl if this was the man—the thick man—she had seen running.

But he would, he thought, some day make a point of telling a little girl that some cats do too have red eyes.



J. B. Priestley

What a Life!

A crime story by another famous literary figure, author of such memorable novels as THE GOOD COMPANIONS and ANGEL PAVEMENT, and such equally memorable plays as "Laburnum Grove" and "An Inspector Calls"... Mr. Priestley has never been reluctant to admit his deep affection for the mystery genre in all its fascinating facets. He now gives us an ironic crime tale about the Brown Lounge of a "nice quiet hotel" in London—"not the sort of place where anybody would expect any trouble"...

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE hotels that are called "quiet hotels for gentlefolk." Apparently, gentlefolk have a passion for an atmosphere of dinginess and slight decay. This hotel, like many of its kind, had two lounges: one at the front, in which people merely waited for one another and for the telephone, and one at the back, the "Brown Lounge," in which a number of large pieces of furniture and some gigantic steel engravings waited for the Day of Judgment. It had been often suggested that there should be public lethal chambers for those unfortunates who are bent on suicide. This "Brown Lounge" would make an excellent lethal chamber, for, even as it is, once inside it

your thoughts turn naturally to the end of this life. Only young and bold spirits could withstand its insidious melancholy. There are two of them in there now.

"What time does the show start?" said the first young man, who was staying at the hotel. He was engaged in manufacturing motor cars in a provincial town and did not often visit London.

"Half past eight," said the other young man, who lived in London and was uproariously in the publicity business.

"Just time for a drink, then," said the other, ringing the bell.

After a minute or two a waiter appeared, a vague, oldish chap, the sort of waiter you expect in that sort of hotel.

"Two whiskies," said the first young man.

"Two whiskies, sir," the waiter replied, in a colorless voice. "Yes, sir." And drifted away.

The second young man yawned and then glanced round the room. "What the devil made you come here?" he demanded. "It's a ghastly hole."

"Pretty dismal, I admit. Fellow at the works, one of our designers, said he'd stayed here and it was all right, fairly cheap, and quiet at night."

"Quiet! It's dead and buried. Still, I suppose you're out most of the time?"

"Gosh, yes. If I wasn't. I'd try something livelier than this," the visitor replied, as the waiter returned with the drinks. "Thanks. How much? Here you are, and keep the change."

"Thank you, sir," said the waiter.

"Very quiet here, waiter."

"Very quiet just now, sir." And the waiter picked up his tray and departed.

"I suppose that poor devil will spend the rest of the night waiting for somebody to come in."

"He will," said the second young man. "Not exactly a whirl of excitement, eh? What a life!"

"What a life!"

"Well, cheerio!"

"Cheerio! I suppose we'd better push off if we want to see that show."

They swallowed their drinks and pushed off, leaving two little glasses in the wilderness of the lounge, which sank into deepest quiet and melancholy again.

It was some time, however, before the waiter cleared away those two glasses. He was not very busy and he was not, as a rule, neglectful of his duty, but it happened that he had been waiting for the telephone bell to ring for him, and it rang before he returned to the lounge.

"Is it for me?" he inquired, eagerly, and for the fifth time that evening.

The reception clerk, who knew what it was all about, nodded, and regarded him sympathetically. "I'll put it right through to the staff room."

There was nothing colorless about his voice now, as he answered the call. It was not the voice of a waiter at all, and there was a terrible urgency in it. As he spoke, a faint ring of moisture appeared just below the line of his graying hair.

"Hello, hello! Yes, that's me," he cried. "A daughter, eh? Yes, yes, that's all right. Is she? You're sure about that? Both of them? Did she say anything? Did she? Is that right? Oh,

that's fine. Yes, of course. How soon? All right, then, I'll be round at ten in the morning. And thank you very much. Yes, I'm sure she is. Thank you. And tell her how glad I am, don't forget that. Yes, at ten."

After he had put down the receiver, he drew a long breath, waited a moment and wiped his forehead, then went back to the office. "It's all right," he said to the reception clerk. "I've finished."

"What's the news?" that young lady inquired.

"A daughter, and they're both doing fine."

"That's good. What's the baby like?"

"Only a little one—six pounds and a bit," replied the waiter.

"The little ones are nearly always the best. That's what my cousin says, and she does maternity work. Well, you're a grandfather now."

"So I am," said the waiter. "I never thought of that. An hour ago I was just a father, and now I'm a grandfather. That's queer, you know."

"It's a queer world, that's what I always say. Let me see, haven't I met your daughter? Hasn't she been round here to see you once or twice?"

"That's the one," said the waiter, and there was a distinct note of pride in his voice. It

suggested that the baby had been lucky to find such a mother, that he had been lucky to have such a daughter, and that even the reception clerk had been lucky in merely meeting such a girl. A proud grandfather, a partly relieved though still anxious father, the waiter now withdrew, to think things over. It had been his job to see his daughter through this queer and difficult time. It was her first baby, and her husband, a good lad but not quite as steady as he might be, was now trying his hand at being a steward on a big cargo boat, and at this moment was somewhere off Sydney. If you had seen the waiter clearing away those two glasses in the Brown Lounge, you would not have realized that his forehead was still damp with perspiration and that his head was humming with plans.

Nothing happened in the Brown Lounge until a little after nine. Then the massive sideboard, the grim armchairs, and the sad steel engravings were disturbed by the entrance of a woman in a rather dubious fur coat. She still carried with her, at once defiantly and anxiously, the red and bronze remains of somewhat hard good looks. She belonged to that mysterious class of women who

are often found behaving "like perfect ladies" in places that perfect ladies usually contrive to avoid. Once inside the lounge, this woman rang the bell and then made several movements that suggested, with truth, that she was in an agitated state of mind.

The bell was answered by our friend the waiter. He came in as a waiter, but the moment he saw who it was that had rung the bell, all the waiterishness departed from him and he looked what he was—namely, a surprised, annoyed middle-aged man.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Wanted to talk to you, Joe," the woman replied, promptly, "and I thought the easiest way would be to come in here and not go asking for you at the back. Nobody'll come in, will they?"

"They might."

"Yes, and then they might not," she retorted.

"Well?"

"Listen, Joe," she said, in a very different tone of voice, "what about Alice? How's she getting on?"

"Who told you about Alice?"

"What's it matter who told me? If you want to know, I saw Mrs. Brewer, and she told me you'd told her Alice was going

to have a baby. Joe, tell me—what's happened? Is it all right?"

The waiter was silent for a moment.

The woman gave a little yelp of impatience, then seized his arm and shook it. "Come on. Don't stand there like that. What is it? My God, if she's—"

"She's all right, at least so far she is," he told her, curtly. "It happened tonight and she's doing well."

"What is it?"

"A girl."

"A girl!" the woman cried, with a little emotional gulp. "A girl! Poor little devil! And they're all right?"

"They're both all right."

The woman laughed, not very pleasantly. "And now I'm a grandmother. My God!—think of that. Grannie! That puts the years on you, doesn't it? But never mind about that. Listen, Joe—and I'm serious now—I've got to see her. Where is she?"

"Don't you worry. She's all right."

"Don't be a fool, Joe. I've got to see her now. Where is she?"

"I've told you—she's all right. I'm looking after her."

"Do you mean you're not going to let me see her now?" The woman's voice rose almost to a scream.

"Not so much noise," he

said to her, not very kindly.

"What do I care how much noise I make! You've got to tell me where Alice is and I've got to see her. I'm her mother, aren't I?"

"You ought to have thought about that a long time ago, before you decided to let some of the flash fellows keep you." The waiter was very grim now. He kept his eyes fixed on those of the woman standing in front of him. They were hard blue eyes that he saw there; and he knew them only too well, especially in this mood of rising anger, heading towards either tears or screams and curses; and as he stared at them it occurred to him that it was very odd that they should be the eyes of a woman whose name was still his, who was still his wife. They had made no attempt to live together for the last ten years, but they had not been divorced. He did not want to marry again, and she did not seem to find it difficult to call herself Mrs. This and then Mrs. That.

"You always was a mean devil, Joe," his wife proclaimed.

"Yes," he put in, hastily, bitterly, "I've no doubt you've found 'em not so mean where you've been since."

"Well, if you want to know, I have. Now, look here, Joe. I'm the girl's mother, and this is the time when a girl wants to see

her mother, and I'm going to see her. Where is she?"

"I'm not going to tell you, and you're not going to see her. Leave her alone. She doesn't want you, and I don't—I only want you to be a long way off."

"Don't worry, I'm not after you. You never was any catch at any time, and you're not one now, I can tell you. But I've a right to see my own child. She's my daughter."

"Not now, she isn't," the waiter told her. "You've done. I'll see to that."

"You'll see to a lot, won't you?" she jeered. "One thing's certain, though. She's my daughter. She might be yours, and then she might not."

"What!" He shot out a hand, and it fastened on her wrist. "What're you trying to tell me now? What's the idea?" He was really ferocious now, unlike any respectable waiter.

This sudden ferocity left the woman uneasy. She wrenched her arm away, and then said, hastily: "Oh, don't be a fool, Joe. You know very well she was yours, all right. Where is she? I only want to see her and the baby together. What's the harm in that?"

"That's my business. I've not interfered with you, so don't you interfere with me. You've gone your own way, so just keep to it. And leave Alice

alone. I warn you—leave her alone.”

At this moment, while they were still glaring at one another, somebody came quietly into the room. She was a tiny old woman, all rings and brooches and lilac silk and black satin, and the waiter knew her well, for she came up from the country regularly.

“There you are, waiter,” she said, nodding and smiling at him. “Now I needn’t ring, need I? Could you get me a nice cup of tea, just a cup?”

“Cup of tea? Certainly, m’,” said the waiter, and without another glance at his wife, he walked out. When he came back five minutes later, his wife had disappeared.

“You know, waiter,” the old lady remarked as he set the tea before her, “some people say tea at night keeps you awake, but I don’t find it so. I don’t like to go to bed without my cup of tea.”

“All a matter of habit, m’.”

“I expect it is,” said the old lady.

“I’m sure it is. I like a cup myself.”

The old lady, who was a friendly soul, nodded brightly at this, and kept him there a minute or two longer while she told him how long she had been having her late cup and what various relations thought about

it. And when she had done, she gave him a sixpenny tip, which was very handsome for a single cup of tea. The waiter could not help reflecting how surprised she would have been if she had learned that the woman who had just gone out was the waiter’s wife and a good many other things besides.

Twenty minutes later the bell in the lounge rang again, and the waiter found that the old lady, now sitting in a dream over her empty cup, had company in the shape of a bulky, florid-faced fellow who was smoking a cigar. He looked at the waiter and gave him a tiny knowing grin. The waiter stared for a moment, then promptly relapsed into blank waiterdom.

“Yes, sir?”

“Oh—yes—er—let me see, waiter. I think I’ll have a double Scotch and a small soda. I’m not staying here, but that’s all right, isn’t it? I want to see somebody here.” He put a curious emphasis into this last.

“That’s all right,” the waiter muttered, removing the old lady’s cup.

“What time is it?” the old lady inquired.

Before the waiter could reply, the newcomer, with a flourish, had taken out a heavy gold watch, and replied: “Five

minutes to ten."

"Thank you. Time for me to go to bed, then," she told them both, and the waiter held the door open for her and then retired to get the whisky.

"Two and tenpence," said the waiter, the moment after he had placed the drink in front of the visitor.

The bulky, florid-faced man grinned, and then, with a careful and rather praiseworthy attempt at complete non-chalance, remarked: "You're not going to stand me this one, Joe?"

"I'm not."

The other handed over three shillings. "Keep the change," he cried, giving a creditable burlesque of a generous visitor.

The waiter said nothing, but merely swept the coins into his pocket and began moving away.

"Wait a minute, Joe, wait a minute. It's no use pretending not to know me."

"Oh, I knew you all right, Dobby," said the waiter, as he stopped and turned. "But what of it?"

"I told you just now I came in here to see somebody. Well, you're him."

"How did you know I was here?" the waiter asked.

"I ran into Maggie not half a mile away," the bulky man explained, with a flowing gesture, "and she told me she'd

just been having a little talk with you in here. Full of it, she was. You ought to have heard her, Joe. It's a long time since I met Maggie—I mean before tonight—but she's not changed a bit. Still got a lively tongue in her head. Cor!—you ought to have heard her going on about you, Joe. I tell you what it is—you can't handle women, Joe. You never could."

"You didn't come here to tell me that, did you, Dobby?" the waiter inquired. "Because if you did, you're wasting your valuable time." And he made another move as if to depart.

"Just a minute, Joe. Don't be so impatient. I came in here to have a look at you, Joe, in your nice waiter's clothes, and I also came in here just to have a look around. Nice quiet hotel, Joe, very nice quiet hotel this. Not the sort of place where anybody would expect any trouble. The police don't worry you much here, Joe, do they? I shouldn't think they would. Very nice and quiet—and gentlemanly."

"Cut it short, Dobby."

Dobby grinned again. He appeared to be enjoying himself. "Well, Joe, if you want it short, you shall have it short. Now I've got a little scheme. I won't tell you what it is now, but you know my little schemes—you've met 'em be-

fore, haven't you, Joe? And for this little scheme I want a nice quiet place to stay in for a week or two, just like this, and so I thought I'd stay here and then you could help me, couldn't you, Joe?"

"Nothing doing," the waiter announced.

"Now don't be hasty, Joe. You don't know what it is you've got to do."

"And I don't want to know. But understand this, Dobby—you don't let me in for it and you don't try anything on here."

"Oh, I don't, eh?" The bulky man seemed to be amused.

The waiter was not amused. He was very grim, and there was a curious strained look about his eyes. He came a little nearer now, and though, when he spoke, he was quieter than he had been before, there was a very unpleasant quality in his voice. "You know very well I'm running straight now, Dobby. You're not going to try anything on here, and that's flat."

"Going back on your old friends, eh, Joe? Do you think that's wise?"

"I've told you," said the waiter. "I'm running straight now."

"A nice respectable waiter in a nice respectable hotel. That's

the line now, is it, Joe?"

Dobby looked at his cigar, put it down, then finished his whisky in one big gulp. He looked up. "It's no good coming the high and mighty with me, Joe, and you know it. How did you get this job? Never mind. I don't want to know. But I'll bet they don't know here that you're an old lag."

The waiter tried to moisten his lips. "They don't," he admitted.

"Of course they don't. Nice respectable, gentlemanly hotel like this. What!—have an old lag as a waiter? Dear me, couldn't be done! A convicted—"

"All right, all right," the waiter interrupted hastily.

"A word from me to the management and where's the nice job then?"

"You wouldn't do that, Dobby," the waiter cried.

"I don't want to do it, Joe, but if an old friend won't do a little job for me, quite a safe job, safe as houses, well, then, I might have to make trouble. And that, would be very, very easy."

"Why can't you leave me alone? I'm not interfering with you. I've finished with your lot. I've had my medicine—and that's a damn' sight more than you've had yet, Dobby, don't forget that."

"Ah, you see, Joe, I'm not only lucky but I'm clever," Mr. Dobby protested airily. "I don't look it, I know. But I'm clever."

"I'm going straight. I earn what I make, and I'm interfering with nobody. For God's sake, leave me alone, Dobby."

"Can't do that, Joe. Sorry, but it can't be done. You can't go back on your old friends like that. If you help me with this little idea of mine, there's no trouble coming to you, nothing but a little present from an old friend. But if you're going to be awkward, Joe, you're not going to get away with it. We can't have you pretending to be respectable any longer. You're losing this job, see? And you won't get another in a hurry, will you? And then there's this daughter of yours who's just had the baby."

"You've got hold of that, too, have you?" said the waiter, bitterly. "Not much you miss, is there, Dobby?"

"Got it all from Maggie tonight. I tell you, Joe, when women are angry, they spill it all. You don't know how to manage 'em, Joe, and that's where you get yourself into trouble. Now what's it going to be? Are you going to be awkward or am I?"

The waiter came nearer still, very close indeed, leaning on

the little table and gradually lowering his head. He looked monstrously unlike any possible waiter; a dangerous man. "Now you've got to listen to me a minute, Dobby," he began, in a tone that was hardly above a whisper. "It's taken me some time to get going. I'm all right here. But if you shop me, I'll have to go."

"Yes, and then—what?"

"I know. You needn't tell me. I'm telling you now. If you shop me, and they turn me off here, I've finished. It's taken me years to get as far as this, but it won't take five minutes to push me back again. I'm through then. But what about you, Dobby, what about you?"

"What'd you mean?" Mr. Dobby must have been feeling rather uneasy, for he was blustering a little now. "You can't shop me, Joe, and you needn't think it. Cleverer men than you have tried to do that, and they missed the bus all right."

The waiter produced what must have been the shortest and most unpleasant laugh ever heard in that room. He put out a hand, resting all his weight on the other, and though it was a waiter's hand, it was very large and powerful. "I sha'n't bother about that, Dobby," he whispered. "I'll do it all myself. I'll put you where you won't make

any trouble again. I sha'n't have any work to do, and I sha'n't want any. I'll spend all my time looking for you, Dobby, and when I've found you, I'll make a good job of it."

Mr. Dobby was no longer as florid-looking as he had been before, but he tried to carry off the situation. "And that's been said before, and tried before, and it hasn't come off."

"It will this time," said the waiter. "I sha'n't do it myself, either. There'll be two of us. I know where Raspy is. Raspy's out, y'know, Dobby."

"Raspy's out," the other admitted, uneasily. "But he's dead."

"He's not dead. I saw him, spoke to him, not two months since, and I know where he is now. He wants to meet you again, Dobby, but he thinks you're a long way off, in South America. You should hear what he says about you, Dobby, and what he'd like to do to you. And the minute I'm turned off here I'm going to Raspy, and then we'll come looking for you, Dobby. And I mean that. Leave me here and I'll interfere with nobody, but get me turned out into the street again and I'm a desperate man, see?"

"I see, Joe."

The waiter drew back from the table, "So just take your little schemes somewhere else,

Dobby. You're not trying anything on here."

Mr. Dobby rose from his chair and made for the door. "All right, Joe. Keep on being a good boy. So long." He carried it off with his customary swagger, but there could be no denying that he had lost the rubber.

The waiter did not follow him out. He stood motionless for several minutes, breathing deeply, like a man who had just saved his skin only by the fraction of an inch. Then something seemed to happen to him; he shrank a little; the light died out of his eyes; certain lines vanished from his face; and, in fact, he turned into a middle-aged waiter again. There were a glass and an empty soda-water bottle to remove. He removed them.

"Well, here we are again," said the first young man.

"I'll push off in a minute, old man," said the second young man, seating himself on the arm of a chair. "I've a busy day tomorrow."

"You've time for a quick one."

And he rang the bell. The same old waiter appeared. "Two whiskies, please."

"Two whiskies, sir," the waiter replied, in a colorless voice. "Yes, sir."

The second young man yawned and then glanced round the room. "Don't stay in this hole again."

"Wait a minute," cried the first young man. "This room has actually had a customer or guest or visitor in it since we left. I smell cigar smoke and I see here the stump of a cigar. You know my methods, Watson."

"I can't believe it. I think the waiter must have come in and smoked it on the sly."

The waiter returned. "I'm

going off duty now, sir, but if you want anything else, the night porter'll get it."

"Thanks, but I sha'n't. Here you are."

"Thank you, sir."

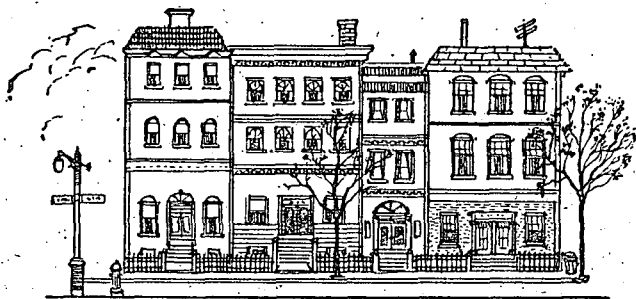
"Still very quiet here, waiter."

"Very quiet just now, sir." And the waiter picked up his tray and departed.

"Not a bad chap, that waiter, but—my hat!—what a life!"

"What a life! Well—cheerio!"

"Cheerio!"



Cornell Woolrich

Momentum

We quote from the publisher's "blurb" on the dust jacket of one of Cornell Woolrich's (William Irish's) books of short stories: "A superb collection of spine-chillers, each a polished example of the art of detection, in which [the author] again proves his unique ability to let the reader share the agony of the hunted and the terror of the doomed."

While it is not always safe, or even wise, to trust a publisher's blurb, we can find no fault with the one quoted above, and here is a Woolrich-Irish novelet that confirms the publisher's critical acumen . . .

P AINE HUNG AROUND outside the house waiting for old Ben Burroughs' caller to go, because he wanted to see him alone. You can't very well ask anyone for a loan of \$250 in the presence of someone else, especially when you have a pretty strong hunch you're going to be turned down flat and told where to go.

But he had a stronger reason for not wanting witnesses to his interview with the old skinflint. The large handkerchief in his back pocket, folded triangularly, had a special purpose, and that little instrument in another pocket—wasn't it to be used in prying open a window?

While he lurked in the shrubbery, watching the lighted

window and Burroughs' seated form inside it, he kept rehearsing the plea he'd composed, as though he were still going to use it.

"Mr. Burroughs, I know it's late, and I know you'd rather not be reminded that I exist, but desperation can't wait, and I'm desperate." That sounded good. "Mr. Burroughs, I worked for your concern faithfully for ten long years, and the last six months of its existence, to help keep it going, I voluntarily worked at half wages, on your given word that my defaulted pay would be made up as soon as things got better. Instead of that, you went into phony bankruptcy to cancel your obligations."

Then a little soft soap to take the sting out of it. "I haven't come near you all these years, and I haven't come to make trouble now. If I thought you really didn't have the money, I still wouldn't. But it's common knowledge by now that the bankruptcy was feigned; it's obvious by the way you continue to live that you salvaged your own investment; and I've lately heard rumors of your backing a dummy corporation under another name to take up where you left off. Mr. Burroughs, the exact amount of the six-months promissory half wages due me is two hundred and fifty dollars."

Just the right amount of dignity and self-respect, Pauline had commented at this point; not wishy-washy or maudlin, just quiet and effective.

And then for a bang-up finish, and every word of it true. "Mr. Burroughs, I have to have help tonight; it can't wait another twenty-four hours. There's a hole the size of a fifty-cent-piece in the sole of each of my shoes, I have a wedge of cardboard in the bottom of each one. We haven't had light or gas in a week now. There's a bailiff coming tomorrow morning to put out the little that's left of our furniture and seal the door.

"If I was alone in this, I'd

still fight it through, without going to anyone. But, Mr. Burroughs, I have a wife at home to support. You may not remember her, a pretty little dark-haired girl who once worked as a stenographer in your office for a month or two. You surely wouldn't know her now, she's aged twenty years in the past two."

That was about all. That was about all anyone could have said. And yet Paine knew he was licked before he even uttered a word of it.

He couldn't see the old man's visitor. The caller was out of range of the window. Burroughs was seated in a line with it, profile toward Paine. Paine could see his mean, thin-lipped mouth moving. Once or twice he raised his hand in a desultory gesture. Then he seemed to be listening and finally he nodded slowly. He held his forefinger up and shook it, as if impressing some point on his auditor. After that he rose and moved deeper into the room, but without getting out of line with the window.

He stood against the far wall, hand out to a tapestry hanging there. Paine craned his neck, strained his eyes. There must be a wall safe behind there the old codger was about to open.

If he only had a pair of binoculars handy.

Paine saw the old miser pause, turn his head and make some request of the other person. A hand abruptly grasped the looped shade cord and drew the shade to the bottom.

Paine gritted his teeth. The old fossil wasn't taking any chances, was he? You'd think he's a mind-reader, knew there was someone out there. But a chink remained, showing a line of light at the bottom. Paine sidled out of his hiding place and slipped up to the window. He put his eyes to it, focused on Burroughs' dialing hand, to the exclusion of everything else.

A three-quarters turn to the left, about to where the numeral 8 would be on the face of a clock. Then back to about where 3 would be. Then back the other way, this time to 10. Simple enough. He must remember that—8-3-10.

Burroughs was opening it now and bringing out a cash box. He set it down on the table and opened it. Paine's eyes hardened and his mouth twisted sullenly. Look at all that money! The old fossil's gnarled hand dipped into it, brought out a sheaf of bills, counted them. He put back a few, counted the remainder a second time and set them on the table-top while he returned the cash box, closed the safe, straightened out the tapestry.

A blurred figure moved partly into the way at this point, too close to the shade gap to come clearly into focus; but without obliterating the little stack of bills on the table. Burroughs' claw-like hand picked them up, held them out. A second hand, smoother, reached for them. The two hands shook.

Paine prudently retreated to his former lookout point. He knew where the safe was now, that was all that mattered. He wasn't a moment too soon. The shade shot up an instant later, this time with Burroughs' hand guiding its cord. The other person had withdrawn offside again. Burroughs moved after him out of range, and the room abruptly darkened. A moment later a light flickered on in the porch ceiling.

Paine quickly shifted to the side of the house, in the moment's grace given him, in order to make sure his presence wasn't detected.

The door opened. Burroughs' voice croaked a curt "Night," to which the departing visitor made no answer. The interview had evidently not been an altogether cordial one. The door closed again, with quite a little force. A quick step crossed the porch, went along the cement walk to the street, away from where Paine stood pressed flat against the side of

the house. He didn't bother trying to see who it was. It was too dark for that, and his primary purpose was to keep his own presence concealed.

When the anonymous tread had safely died away in the distance, Paine moved to where he could command the front of the house. Burroughs was alone in it now, he knew; he was too niggardly even to employ a full-time servant. A dim light showed for a moment or two through the fanlight over the door, coming from the back of the hall. Now was the time to ring the doorbell, if he expected to make his plea to the old duffer before he retired.

He knew that, and yet something seemed to be keeping him from stepping up onto the porch and ringing the doorbell. He knew what it was, too, but he wouldn't admit it to himself.

"He'll only say no point-blank and slam the door in my face," was the excuse he gave himself as he crouched back in the shrubbery, waiting. "And then once he's seen me out here, I'll be the first one he'll suspect afterwards when—"

The fanlight had gone dark now and Burroughs was on his way upstairs. A bedroom window, on the floor above lighted up. There was still time; if he rang even now, Burroughs

would come downstairs again and answer the door. But Paine didn't make the move, stayed there patiently waiting.

The bedroom window blacked out at last, and the house was now dark and lifeless. Paine stayed there, still fighting with himself. Not a battle, really, because that had been lost long ago; but still giving himself excuses for what he knew he was about to do. Excuses for not going off about his business and remaining what he had been until now—an honest man.

How could he face his wife, if he came back empty-handed tonight? Tomorrow their furniture would be piled on the sidewalk. Night after night he had promised to tackle Burroughs, and each time he'd put it off, walked past the house without summoning up nerve enough to go through with it. Why? For one thing, he didn't have the courage to stomach the sharp-tongued, sneering refusal that he was sure he'd get. But the more important thing had been the realization that once he made his plea, he automatically cancelled this other, unlawful way of getting the money. Burroughs had probably forgotten his existence after all these years, but if he reminded him of it by interviewing him ahead of time—

He tightened his belt decisively. Well, he wasn't coming home to her empty-handed tonight, but he still wasn't going to tackle Burroughs for it either. She'd never need to find out just how he'd got it.

He straightened and looked all around him. No one in sight. The house was isolated. Most of the streets around it were only laid out and paved by courtesy; they bordered vacant lots. He moved in cautiously but determinedly toward the window of that room where he had seen the safe.

Cowardice can result in the taking of more risks than the most reckless courage. He was afraid of little things—afraid of going home and facing his wife empty-handed, afraid of asking an ill-tempered old reprobate for money because he knew he would be reviled and driven away—and so he was about to break into a house, become a burglar for the first time in his life.

It opened so easily. It was almost an invitation to unlawful entry. He stood up on the sill, and the cover of a paper book of matches, thrust into the intersection between the two window halves, pushed the tongue of the latch out of the way.

He dropped down to the ground, applied the little

instrument he had brought to the lower frame, and it slid effortlessly up. A minute later he was in the room, had closed the window so it wouldn't look suspicious from the outside. He wondered why he'd always thought until now it took skill and patience to break into a house. There was nothing to it.

He took out the folded handkerchief and tied it around the lower part of his face. For a minute he wasn't going to bother with it, and later he was sorry he had, in one way. And then again, it probably would have happened anyway, even without it. It wouldn't keep him from being seen, only from being identified.

He knew enough not to light the room lights, but he had nothing so scientific as a pocket torch with him to take their place. He had to rely on ordinary matches, which meant he could only use one hand for the safe dial, after he had cleared the tapestry out of the way.

It was a toy thing, a gimcrack. He hadn't even the exact combination, just the approximate position—8-3-10. It wouldn't work the first time, so he varied it slightly, and then it clicked free.

He opened it, brought out the cash box, set it on the table. It was as though the act of

setting it down threw a master electric switch. The room was suddenly drenched with light and Burroughs stood in the open doorway, bathrobe around his weazened frame, left hand out to the wall switch, right hand holding a gun trained on Paine.

Paine's knees knocked together, his windpipe constricted, and he died a little—the way only an amateur caught red-handed at his first attempt can, a professional never. His thumb stung unexpectedly, and he whipped out the live match he was holding.

"Just got down in time, didn't I?" the old man said with spiteful satisfaction. "It mayn't be much of a safe, but it sets off a buzzer up by my bed every time it swings open."

He should have moved straight across to the phone, right there in the room with Paine, and called for help, but he had a vindictive streak in him, he couldn't resist standing and rubbing it in.

"Ye know what ye're going to get for this, don't ye?" he went on, licking his indrawn lips. "And I'll see that ye get it, too, every last month of it that's coming to ye." He took a step forward. "Now get away from that. Get all the way back over there and don't ye make a move until I—"

A sudden dawning suspicion entered his glittering little eyes. "Wait a minute. Haven't I seen you somewhere before? There's something familiar about you." He moved closer. "Take off that mask," he ordered. "Let me see who the devil you are!"

Paine became panic-stricken at the thought of revealing his face. He didn't stop to think that as long as Burroughs had him at gun-point anyway, and he couldn't get away, the old man was bound to find out who he was sooner or later.

He shook his head in unreasoning terror.

"No!" he panted hoarsely, billowing out the handkerchief over his mouth. He even tried to back away, but there was a chair or something in the way, and he couldn't.

That brought the old man in closer. "Then by golly I'll take it off for ye!" he snapped. He reached out for the lower triangular point of it. His right hand slanted out of line with Paine's body as he did so, was no longer exactly covering it with the gun. But the variation was nothing to take a chance on.

Cowardice. Cowardice that spurs you to a rashness the stoutest courage would quail from. Paine didn't stop to think of the gun. He suddenly hooked onto both the old man's arms,

spread-eagled them. It was such a harebrained chance to take that Burroughs wasn't expecting it, and accordingly it worked. The gun clicked futilely, pointed up toward the ceiling; it must have jammed, or else the first chamber was empty and Burroughs hadn't known it.

Paine kept warding that arm off at a wide angle. But his chief concern was the empty hand clawing toward the handkerchief. That he swiveled far downward the other way, out of reach. He twisted the scrawny skin around the old man's skinny right wrist until pain made the hand flop over open and drop the gun. It fell between them to the floor, and Paine scuffed it a foot or two out of reach with the side of his foot.

Then he locked that same foot behind one of Burroughs' and pushed him over it. The old man went sprawling backwards on the floor, and the short, unequal struggle was over. Yet even as he went, he was victorious. His downflung left arm, as Paine released it to send him over, swept up in an arc, clawed, and took the handkerchief with it.

He sprawled there now, cradled on the point of one elbow, breathing malign recognition that was like a knife

through Paine's heart. "You're Dick Paine, you dirty crook! I know ye now! You're Dick Paine, my old employee! You're going to pay for this—"

That was all he had time to say. That was his own death warrant. Paine was acting under such neuro-muscular compulsion, brought on by the instinct of self-preservation, that he wasn't even conscious of stooping to retrieve the fallen gun. The next thing he knew it was in his hand, pointed toward the accusing mouth that was all he was afraid of.

He jerked the trigger. For the second time it clicked—either jammed or unloaded at that chamber. He was to have that on his conscience afterwards, that click—like a last chance given him to keep from doing what he was about to do. That made it something different, that took away the shadowy little excuse he would have had until now; that changed it from an impulsive act committed in the heat of combat to a deed of cold-blooded, deliberate murder, with plenty of time to think twice before it was committed. And conscience makes cowards of us all. And he was a coward to begin with.

Burroughs even had time to sputter the opening syllables of a desperate plea for mercy, a

promise of immunity. True, he probably wouldn't have kept it.

"Don't! Paine—Dick, don't! I won't say anything, I won't tell 'em you were here—"

But Burroughs knew who he was. Paine tugged at the trigger, and the third chamber held death in it. This time the gun crashed, and Burroughs' whole face was veiled in a huff of smoke. By the time it had thinned he was already dead, head on the floor, a tenuous thread of red streaking from the corner of his mouth, as though he had no more than split his lip.

Paine was the amateur even to the bitter end. In the death hush that followed, his first half-audible remark was: "Mr. Burroughs, I didn't mean to—"

Then he just stared in white-faced consternation. "Now I've done it! I've killed a man—and they kill you for that! Now I'm in for it!"

He looked at the gun, appalled, as though it alone, and not he, was to blame for what had happened. He picked up the handkerchief, dazedly rubbed at the weapon, then desisted again. It seemed to him safer to take it with him, even though it was Burroughs' own. He had an amateur's mystic dread of fingerprints. He was sure he wouldn't be able to clean it thoroughly enough to

remove all traces of his own handling; even in the very act of trying to clean it, he might leave others. He sheathed it in the inner pocket of his coat.

He looked this way and that. He'd better get out of here; he'd better get out of here. Already the drums of flight were beginning to beat in him, and he knew they'd never be silent again.

The cash box was still standing there on the table where he'd left it, and he went to it, flung the lid up. He didn't want this money any more, it had curdled for him, it had become blood money. But he had to have some, at least; to make it easier to keep from getting caught. He didn't stop to count how much there was in it; there must have been at least a thousand, by the looks of it. Maybe even fifteen or eighteen hundred.

He wouldn't take a cent more than was coming to him. He'd only take the two hundred and fifty he'd come here to get. To his frightened mind that seemed to make his crime less heinous, if he contented himself with taking just what was rightfully his. That seemed to keep it from being outright murder and robbery, enabled him to maintain the fiction that it had been just a collection of a debt accompanied by a frightful

and unforeseen accident. And one's conscience, after all, is the most dreaded policeman of the lot.

And furthermore, he realized as he hastily counted it out, thrust the sum into his back trouser pocket, buttoned the pocket down, he couldn't tell his wife that he'd been here—or she'd know what he'd done. He'd have to make her think that he'd got the money somewhere else. That shouldn't be hard. He'd put off coming here to see Burroughs night after night, he'd shown her plainly that he hadn't relished the idea of approaching his former boss; she'd been the one who had kept egging him on.

Only tonight she'd said, "I don't think you'll ever carry it out. I've about given up hope."

So what more natural than to let her think that in the end he hadn't? He'd think up some other explanation to account for the presence of the money; he'd have to. If not right tonight, then tomorrow. It would come to him after the shock of this had worn off a little and he could think more calmly.

Had he left anything around that would betray him, that they could trace to him? He'd better put the cash box back; there was just a chance that they wouldn't know exactly

how much the old skinflint had had on hand. They often didn't, with his type. He wiped it off carefully with the handkerchief he'd had around his face, twisted the dial closed on it, dabbed at that. He didn't go near the window again; he put out the light and made his way out by the front door of the house.

He opened it with the handkerchief and closed it after him again, and, after an exhaustive survey of the desolate street, came down off the porch, moved quickly along the front walk, turned left along the gray tape of sidewalk that threaded the gloom, toward the distant trolley line that he wasn't going to board at this particular stop, at this particular hour.

He looked up once or twice at the star-flecked sky as he trudged along. It was over. That was all there was to it. Just a jealously guarded secret now. A memory that he daren't share with anyone else, not even Pauline. But deep within him he knew better. It wasn't over, it was just beginning. That had been just the curtain raiser, back there. Murder, like a snowball rolling down a slope, gathers momentum as it goes.

He had to have a drink. He had to try to drown the damn thing out of him. He couldn't

go home dry with it on his mind. They stayed open until four, didn't they, places like that? He wasn't much of a drinker, he wasn't familiar with details like that. Yes, there was one over there, on the other side of the street. And this was far enough away, more than two-thirds of the way from Burroughs' to his own place.

It was empty. That might be better; then again it might not. He could be too easily remembered. Well, too late now, he was already at the bar. "A straight whiskey." The barman didn't even have time to turn away before he spoke again. "Another one."

He shouldn't have done that; that looked suspicious, to gulp it that quick.

"Turn that radio off," he said hurriedly. He shouldn't have said that, that sounded suspicious. The barman had looked at him when he did. And the silence was worse, if anything. Unbearable. Those throbbing drums of danger. "Never mind, turn it on again."

"Make up your mind, mister," the barman said in mild reproof.

He seemed to be doing all the wrong things. He shouldn't have come in here at all, to begin with. Well, he'd get out, before he put his foot in it any worse. "How much?" He took

out the half-dollar and the quarter that was all he had.

"Eighty cents."

His stomach dropped an inch. Not *that* money! He didn't want to have to bring that out, it would show too plainly on his face. "Most places they charge thirty-five a drink."

"Not this brand. You didn't specify." But the barman was on guard now, scenting a dead-beat. He was leaning over the counter, right square in front of him, in a position to take in every move he made with his hands.

He shouldn't have ordered that second drink. Just for a nickel he was going to have to take that whole wad out right under this man's eyes. And maybe he wouldn't remember that tomorrow, after the jumpy way Paine had acted in here!

"Where's the washroom?"

"That door right back there behind the cigarette machine." But the barman was now plainly suspicious; Paine could tell that by the way he kept looking at him.

Paine closed it after him, sealed it with his shoulder blades, unbuttoned his back pocket, riffled through the money, looking for the smallest possible denomination. A ten was the smallest, and there was only one of them; that would

have to do. He cursed himself for getting into such a spot.

The door suddenly gave a heave behind him. Not a violent one, but he wasn't expecting it. It threw him forward off balance. The imperfectly grasped outspread fan of money in his hand went scattering all over the floor. The barman's head showed through the aperture. He started to say: "I don't like the way you're acting. Come on now, get out of my pla—" Then he saw the money.

Burroughs' gun had been an awkward bulk for his inside coat pocket all along. The grip was too big, it overspanned the lining. His abrupt lurch forward had shifted it. It felt as if it was about to fall out of its own weight. He clutched at it to keep it in.

The barman saw the gesture, closed in on him with a grunted "I thought so!" that might have meant nothing or everything.

He was no Burroughs to handle, he was an ox of a man. He pinned Paine back against the wall and held him there more or less helpless. Even so, if he'd only shut up, it probably wouldn't have happened. But he made a tunnel of his mouth and bayed: "Pol-eece! Holdup! Help!"

Paine lost the little presence of mind he had left, became a blurred pinwheel of hand

motion, impossible to control or forestall. Something exploded against the barman's midriff, as though he'd had a firecracker tucked in under his belt.

He coughed his way down to the floor and out of the world.

Another one. Two now. Two in less than an hour. Paine didn't think the words; they seemed to glow out at him, emblazoned on the grimy washroom walls in characters of fire, like in that Biblical story.

He took a step across the prone, white-aproned form as stiffly as though he were high up on stilts. He looked out through the door crack. No one in the bar. And it probably hadn't been heard outside in the street; it had had two doors to go through.

He put the damned thing away, the thing that seemed to be spreading death around just by being in his possession. If he hadn't brought it with him from Burroughs' house, this man would have been alive now. But if he hadn't brought it with him, he would have been apprehended for the first murder by now. Why blame the weapon, why not just blame fate?

That money, all over the floor. He squatted, went for it bill by bill, counting as he went. Twenty, forty, sixty, eighty.

Some of them were on one side of the corpse, some on the other; he had to cross over, not once but several times, in the course of his grisly paper chase. One was even pinned partly under him, and when he'd wangled it out, there was a swirl of blood on the edge. He grimaced, thrust it out, blotted it off. Some of it stayed on, of course.

He had it all now, or thought he did. He couldn't stay in here another minute, he felt as if he were choking. He got it all into his pocket any old way, buttoned it down. Then he eased out, this time looking behind him at what he'd done, not before him. That was how he missed seeing the drunk, until it was too late and the drunk had already seen him.

The drunk was pretty drunk, but maybe not drunk enough to take a chance on. He must have weaved in quietly, while Paine was absorbed in retrieving the money. He was bending over reading the list of selections on the coin phonograph. He raised his head before Paine could get back in again, and to keep him from seeing what lay on the floor in there Paine quickly closed the door behind him.

"Say, itsh about time," the drunk complained. "How about a little servish here?"

Paine tried to shadow his

face as much as he could with the brim of his hat. "I'm not in charge here," he mumbled, "I'm just a customer myself—"

The drunk was going to be sticky. He barnacled onto Paine's lapels as he tried to sidle by. "Don't gimme that. You just hung up your coat in there, you think you're quitting for the night. Well, you ain't quitting until I've had my drink—"

Paine tried to shake him off without being too violent about it and bringing on another hand-to-hand set-to. He hung on like grim death. Or rather, he hung on to grim death—without knowing it.

Paine fought down the flux of panic, the ultimate result of which he'd already seen twice now. Any minute someone might come in from the street. Someone sober. "All right," he breathed heavily, "hurry up, what'll it be?"

"Thass more like it, now you're being reg'lar guy." The drunk released him and he went around behind the bar. "Never anything but good ole Four Roses for mine truly—"

Paine snatched down a bottle at random from the shelf, handed it over bodily. "Here, help yourself. You'll have to take it outside with you, I'm—we're closing up for the night now." He found a

switch, threw it. It only made part of the lights go out. There was no time to bother with the rest. He hustled the bottle-nursing drunk out ahead of him, pulled the door to after the two of them, so that it would appear to be locked even if it wasn't.

The drunk started to make loud plaint, looping around on the sidewalk. "You're a fine guy, not even a glass to drink it out of!"

Paine gave him a slight push in one direction, wheeled and made off in the other.

The thing was, how drunk was he? Would he remember Paine, would he know him if he saw him again? He hurried on, spurred to a run by the night-filling hails and imprecations resounding behind him. He couldn't do it again. Three lives in an hour. He couldn't!

The night was fading when he turned into the little courtyard that was his own. He staggered up the stairs, but not from the two drinks he'd had, from the two deaths.

He stood outside his own door at last—3-B. It seemed such a funny thing to do after killing people—fumble around in your pockets for your latchkey and fit it in, just like other nights. He'd been an honest man when he'd left here,

and now he'd come back a murderer. A double one.

He hoped she was asleep. He couldn't face her right now, couldn't talk to her even if he tried. He was all in emotionally. She'd find out right away just by looking at his face, by looking in his eyes.

He eased the front door closed, tiptoed to the bedroom, looked in. She was lying there asleep. Poor thing, poor helpless thing, married to a murderer.

He went back, undressed in the outer room. Then he stayed in there. Not even stretched out on top of the sofa, but crouched beside it on the floor, head and arms pillowed against its seat. The drums of terror kept pounding. They kept saying, "What am I gonna do now?"

The sun seemed to shoot up the sky, it got to the top so fast. He opened his eyes and it was all the way up. He went to the door and brought in the paper. It wasn't in the morning papers yet, they were made up too soon after midnight.

He turned around and Pauline had come out, was picking up his things. "All over the floor, never saw a man like you—"

He said, "Don't—" and stabbed his hand toward her, but it was already too late. He'd

jammed the bills in so haphazardly the second time, in the bar, that they made a noticeable bulge there in his back pocket. She opened it and took them out, and some of them dribbled onto the floor.

She just stared. "Dick!" She was incredulous, overjoyed. "Not Burroughs? Don't tell me you finally—"

"No!" The name went through him like a red-hot skewer. "I didn't go anywhere near him. He had nothing to do with it!"

She nodded corroboratively. "I thought not, because—"

He wouldn't let her finish. He stepped close to her, took her by both shoulders. "Don't mention his name to me again. I don't want to hear his name again. I got it from someone else."

"Who?"

He knew he'd have to answer her, or she'd suspect something. He swallowed, groped blindly for a name. "Charlie Chalmers," he blurted out.

"But he refused you only last week!"

"Well, he changed his mind." He turned on her tormentedly. "Don't ask me any more questions, Pauline, I can't stand it! I haven't slept all night. There it is, that's all that matters." He took his trousers from her, went into the

bathroom to dress. He'd hidden Burroughs' gun the night before in the built-in laundry hamper in there; he wished he'd hidden the money with it. He put the gun back in the pocket where he'd carried it last night. If she touched him there—

He combed his hair. The drums were a little quieter now, but he knew they'd come back again; this was just the lull before the storm.

He came out again, and she was putting cups on the table. She looked worried now. She sensed that something was wrong. She was afraid to ask him, he could see, maybe afraid of what she'd find out. He couldn't sit here eating, just as though this was any other day. Any minute someone might come here after him.

He passed by the window. Suddenly he stiffened, gripped the curtain. "What's that man doing down there?" She came up behind him. "Standing there talking to the janitor—"

"Why, Dick, what harm is there in that? A dozen people a day stop and chat with—"

He edged back a step behind the frame. "He's looking up at our windows! Did you see that? They both turned and looked up this way! Get back!" His arm swept her behind him.

"Why should we? We haven't done anything."

"They're coming in the entrance to this wing! They're on their way up here—"

"Dick, why are you acting this way, what's happened?"

"Go in the bedroom and wait there." He was a coward, yes. But there are varieties. At least he wasn't a coward that hid behind a woman's skirts. He prodded her in there ahead of him. Then he gripped her shoulder a minute. "Don't ask any questions. If you love me, stay in here until they go away again."

He closed the door on her frightened face. He cracked the gun. Two left in it. "I can get them both," he thought, "if I'm careful. I've got to."

It was going to happen again.

The jangle of the doorbell battery steeled him. He moved with deadly slowness toward the door, feet flat and firm upon the floor. He picked up the newspaper from the table on his way by, rolled it into a funnel, thrust his hand and the gun down into it. The pressure of his arm against his side was sufficient to keep it furled. It was as though he had just been reading and had carelessly tucked the paper under his arm. It hid the gun effectively as long as he kept it slanting down.

He freed the latch and shifted slowly back with the

door, bisected by its edge, the unarmed half of him all that showed. The janitor came into view first, as the gap widened. He was on the outside. The man next to him had a derby hat riding the back of his head, a bristly mustache, was rotating a cigar between his teeth. He looked like—one of those who come after you.

The janitor said with scarcely veiled insolence, "Paine, I've got a man here looking for a flat. I'm going to show him yours, seeing as how it'll be available from today on. Any objections?"

Paine swayed there limply against the door like a garment bag hanging on a hook, as they brushed by. "No," he whispered deflatedly. "No, go right ahead."

He held the door open to make sure their descent continued all the way down to the bottom. As soon as he'd closed it, Pauline caught him anxiously by the arm. "Why wouldn't you let me tell them we're able to pay the arrears now and are staying? Why did you squeeze my arm like that when I started to?"

"Because we're not staying, and I don't want them to know we've got the money. I don't want anyone to know. We're getting out of here."

"Dick, what is it? Have you done something you shouldn't?"

"Don't ask me. Listen, if you love me, don't ask any questions. I'm—in a little trouble. I've got to get out of here. Never mind why. If you don't want to come with me, I'll go alone."

"Anywhere you go, I'll go." Her eyes misted. "But can't it be straightened out?"

Two men dead beyond recall. He gave a bitter smile.

"No, it can't."

"Is it bad?"

He shut his eyes, took a minute to answer. "It's bad, Pauline. That's all you need to know. That's all I want you to know. I've got to get out of here as fast as I can. From one minute to the next it may be too late. Let's get started now. They'll be here to dispossess us sometime today anyway, that'll be a good excuse. We won't wait, we'll leave now."

She went in to get ready. She took so long doing it he nearly went crazy. She didn't seem to realize how urgent it was. She wasted as much time deciding what to take and what to leave behind as though they were going on a weekend jaunt to the country. He kept going to the bedroom door, urging, "Pauline, hurry! Faster, Pauline!"

She cried a good deal. She was an obedient wife; she didn't ask him any more questions about what the trouble was. She just cried about it without knowing what it was.

He was down on hands and knees beside the window, in the position of a man looking for a collar button under a dresser, when she finally came out with the small bag she'd packed. He turned a stricken face to her. "Too late—I can't leave with you. Someone's already watching the place."

She inclined herself to his level, edged up beside him.

"Look straight over to the other side of the street. See him? He hasn't moved for the past ten minutes. People don't just stand like that for no reason—"

"He may be waiting for someone."

"He is," he murmured somberly. "Me."

"But you can't be sure."

"No, but if I put it to the test by showing myself, it'll be too late by the time I find out. You go by yourself, ahead of me."

"No, if you stay, let me stay with you—"

"I'm not staying, I can't! I'll follow you and meet you somewhere. But it'll be easier for us to leave one at a time than both together. I can slip

over the roof or go out the basement way. He won't stop you, they're not looking for you. You go now and wait for me. No, I have a better idea. Here's what you do. You get two tickets and get on the train at the downtown terminal without waiting for me—" He was separating some of the money, thrusting it into her reluctant hand while he spoke. "Now listen closely. Two tickets to Montreal—"

An added flicker of dismay showed in her eyes. "We're leaving the country?"

When you've committed murder, you have no country any more. "We have to, Pauline. Now there's an eight o'clock limited for there every night. It leaves the downtown terminal at eight sharp. It stops for five minutes at the station uptown, at twenty after. That's where I'll get on. Make sure you're on it or we'll miss each other. Keep a seat for me next to you in the day coach—"

She clung to him despairingly. "No, no. I'm afraid you won't come. Something'll happen. You'll miss it. If I leave you now I may never see you again. I'll find myself making the trip up there alone, without you—"

He tried to reassure her, pressing her hands between his. "Pauline, I give you my word of

honor—" That was no good, he was a murderer now. "Pauline, I swear to you—"

"Here—on this. Take a solemn oath on this, otherwise I won't go." She took out a small carnelian cross she carried in her handbag, attached to a little gold chain—one of the few things they hadn't pawned. She palmed it, pressed the flat of his right hand over it. They looked into each other's eyes with sacramental intensity.

His voice trembled. "I swear nothing will keep me from that train; I'll join you on it no matter what happens, no matter who tries to stop me. Rain or shine, *dead or alive*, I'll meet you aboard it at eight twenty tonight!"

She put it away, their lips brushed briefly but fervently.

"Hurry up now," he urged. "He's still there. Don't look at him on your way past. If he should stop you and ask who you are, give another name—"

He went to the outside door with her, watched her start down the stairs. The last thing she whispered up was: "Dick, be careful for my sake. Don't let anything happen to you between now and tonight."

He went back to the window, crouched down, cheekbones to sill. She came out under him in a minute or two. She knew enough not to

look up at their windows, although the impulse must have been strong. The man was still standing over there. He didn't seem to notice her. He even looked off in another direction.

She passed from view behind the building line; their windows were set in on the court that indented it. Paine wondered if he'd ever see her again. Sure he would, he had to. He realized that it would be better for her if he didn't. It wasn't fair to enmesh her in his own doom. But he'd sworn an oath, and he meant to keep it.

Two, three minutes ticked by. The cat-and-mouse play continued. He crouched motionless by the window, the other man stood motionless across the street. She must be all the way down at the corner by now. She'd take the bus there, to go downtown. She might have to wait a few minutes for one to come along, she might still be in sight. But if he was going to go after her, accost her, he would have started by now. He wouldn't keep standing there.

Then, as Paine watched, he did start. He looked down that way, threw away something he'd been smoking, began to move purposefully in that direction. There was no mistaking the fact that he was looking at or after someone, by the

intent way he held his head. He passed from sight.

Paine began to breathe hot and fast. "I'll kill him. If he touches her, tries to stop her, I'll kill him right out in the open street in broad daylight." It was still fear, cowardice, that was at work, although it was almost unrecognizable as such by now.

He felt for the gun, left his hand on it, inside the breast of his coat, straightened to his feet, ran out of the flat and down the stairs. He cut across the little set-in paved courtyard at a sprint, flashed out past the sheltering building line, turned down in the direction they had both taken.

Then as the panorama before him registered, he staggered to an abrupt stop, stood taking it in. It offered three component but separate points of interest. He only noticed two at first. One was the bus down at the corner. The front third of it protruded, door open. He caught a glimpse of Pauline's back as she was in the act of stepping in, unaccompanied and unmolested.

The door closed automatically, and it swept across the vista and disappeared at the other side. On the other side of the street, but nearer at hand, the man who had been keeping the long vigil had stopped a second

time, was gesticulating angrily to a woman laden with parcels whom he had joined. Both voices were so raised they reached Paine without any trouble.

"A solid half-hour I've been standing there and no one home to let me in!"

"Well, is it my fault you went off without your key? Next time take it with you!"

Nearer at hand still, on Paine's own side of the street, a lounging figure detached itself from the building wall and impinged on his line of vision. The man had been only yards away the whole time, but Paine's eyes had been trained on the distance, he'd failed to notice him until now.

His face suddenly loomed out at Paine. His eyes bored into Paine's with unmistakable intent. He didn't look like one of those that come to get you. He acted like it. He thumbed his vest pocket for something, some credential or identification. He said in a soft, slurring voice that held an inflexible command in it, "Just a minute there, buddy. Your name's Paine, ain't it? I want to see you—"

Paine didn't have to give his muscular coordination any signal; it acted for him automatically. He felt his legs carry him back into the shelter of the

courtyard in a sort of slithering jump. He was in at the foot of the public stairs before the other man had even rounded the building line. He was in behind his own door before the remorselessly slow but plainly audible tread had started up them.

The man seemed to be coming up after him alone. Didn't he know Paine had a gun? He'd find out. He was up on the landing now. He seemed to know which floor to stop at, which door to come to a halt before. Probably the janitor had told him. Then why hadn't he come sooner? Maybe he'd been waiting for someone to join him, and Paine had upset the plan by showing himself so soon.

Paine realized he'd trapped himself by returning here. He should have gone up to the roof and over. But the natural instinct of the hunted, whether four-legged or two, is to find a hole, get in out of the open. It was too late now: he was right out there on the other side of the door. Paine tried to keep his harried breathing silent.

To his own ears it grated like sand sifted through a sieve.

He didn't ring the bell and he didn't knock; he tried the knob, in a half-furtive, half-badgering way. That swirl of panic began to churn in Paine

again. He couldn't let him get in; he couldn't let him get away, either. He'd only go and bring others back with him.

Paine pointed the muzzle of the gun to the crack of the door, midway between the two hinges. With his other hand he reached out for the catch that controlled the latch, released it.

Now if he wanted to die, he should open this door.

The man had kept on trying the knob. Now the door slipped in past the frame. The crack at the other side widened in accompaniment as it swung around. Paine ran the gun bore up it even with the side of his head.

The crash was thunderous. He fell into the flat, with only his feet and ankles outside.

Paine came out from behind the door, dragged him the rest of the way in, closed it. He stopped; his hands probed here and there. He found a gun, a heftier, more businesslike one than his. He took that. He found a billfold heavy with cash. He took that, too. He fished for the badge.

There wasn't any in the vest pocket he'd seen him reach toward downstairs. There was only a block of cheaply printed cards. "Star Finance Company. Loans. Up to any amount without security."

So he hadn't been one, after

all; he'd evidently been some kind of a loan shark, drawn by the scent of Paine's difficulties.

Three times now in less than twenty-four hours.

Instinctively he knew he was doomed now, if he hadn't before. There wasn't any more of the consternation he had felt the first two times. He kept buying off time with bullets, that was all it was now. And the rate of interest kept going higher, the time limit kept shortening. There wasn't even any time to feel sorry.

Doors had begun opening outside in the hall, voices were calling back and forth. "What was that—a shot?"

"It sounded like in 3-B."

He'd have to get out now, right away, or he'd be trapped in here again. And this time for good. He shifted the body out of the line of vision from outside, buttoned up his jacket, took a deep breath; then he opened the door, stepped out, closed it after him. Each of the other doors was open with somebody peering out from it. They hadn't ganged up yet in the middle of the hall. Most of them were women, anyway. One or two edged timidly back when they saw him emerge.

"It wasn't anything," he said. "I dropped a clay jug."

He knew they didn't believe him.

He started down the stairs. At the third step he looked over the side, saw the cop coming up. Somebody had already phoned or sent out word. He reversed, flashed around his own landing, and on up from there.

The cop's voice said, "Stop where you are!" He was coming on fast now. But Paine was going just as fast.

The cop's voice said, "Get inside, all of you! I'm going to shoot!"

Doors began slapping shut like firecrackers. Paine switched over abruptly to the rail and shot first.

The cop jolted, but he grabbed the rail and stayed up. He didn't die as easy as the others. He fired four times before he lost his gun. He missed three times and hit Paine the fourth time.

It went in his chest on the right side, and knocked him across the width of the staircase. It flamed with pain, and then it didn't hurt so much. He found he could get up again. Maybe because he had to. He went back and looked down. The cop had folded over the railing and gone sliding down it as far as the next turn, the way a kid does on a bannister. Only sidewise, on his stomach. Then he dropped off onto the landing, rolled over and lay still,

looking up at Paine without seeing him.

Four.

Paine went on up to the roof, but not fast, not easily any more. The steps were like an escalator going the other way, trying to carry him down with them. He went across to the roof of the next flat, and down through that, and came out on the street behind his own. The two buildings were twins, set back-to-back. The prowl car was already screeching to a stop, out of sight back there at his own doorway. He could hear it over the roofs, on this side.

He was wet across the hip. Then he was wet as far down as the knee. And he hadn't been hit in those places, so he must be bleeding a lot. He saw a taxi and he waved to it, and it backed up and got him. It hurt getting in. He couldn't answer for a minute when the driver asked him where to. His sock felt sticky under his shoe now, from the blood. He wished he could stop it until eight twenty. He had to meet Pauline on the train, and that was a long time to stay alive.

The driver had taken him off the street and around the corner without waiting for him to be more explicit. He asked him where to a second time;

Paine said, "What time is it?"

"Quarter to six, cap."

Life was awfully short—and awfully sweet. He said, "Take me to the park and drive me around in it." That was the safest thing to do, that was the one place they wouldn't look for you.

He thought, "I've always wanted to drive around in the park. Not go anywhere, just drive around in it slow. I never had the money to do it before."

He had it now. More money than he had time left to spend it.

The bullet must still be in him. His back didn't hurt, so it hadn't come out. Something must have stopped it. The bleeding had let up. He could feel it drying on him. The pain kept trying to pull him over double though.

The driver noticed it, said: "Are you hurt?"

"No, I've got kind of a cramp, that's all."

"Want me to take you to a drug store?"

Paine smiled weakly. "No, I guess I'll let it ride."

Sundown in the park. So peaceful, so prosaic. Long shadows across the winding paths. A belated nursemaid or two pushing a perambulator homeward. A loiterer or two lingering on the benches in the

dusk. A little lake, with a rowboat on it—a sailor on shore leave rowing his sweetheart around. A lemonade and popcorn man trundling his wagon home for the day.

Stars were coming out. At times the trees were outlined black against the copper western sky. At times the whole thing blurred and he felt as if he were being carried around in a maelstrom. Each time he fought through and cleared his senses again. He had to make that train.

"Let me know when it gets to be eight o'clock."

"Sure, cap. It's only quarter to seven now."

A groan was torn from Paine as they hit a lumpy spot in the driveway. He tried to keep it low, but the driver must have heard it.

"Still hurts you, huh?" he inquired sympathetically. "You oughta get it fixed up." He began to talk about his own indigestion. "Take me for instance. I'm okay until I eat tamales and root beer. Any time that I eat tamales and root beer—"

He shut up abruptly. He was staring fixedly into the rear-sight mirror. Paine warily clutched his lapels together over his darkened shirt front. He knew it was too late to do any good.

The driver didn't say anything for a long time. He was thinking it over, and he was a slow thinker. Then finally he suggested, off-handedly, "Care to listen to the radio?"

Paine knew what he was out for. He thought, "He wants to see if he can get anything on me over it."

"May as well," the driver urged. "It's thrown in with the fare, won't cost you nothing extra."

"Go ahead," Paine consented. He wanted to see if he could hear anything himself.

It made the pain a little easier to bear, like music always does. "I used to dance, too," Paine thought, listening to the tune, "before I started killing people."

It didn't come over for a long time.

"A city-wide alarm is out for Richard Paine. Paine, who was about to be dispossessed from his flat, shot and killed a finance company employee. Then when Officer Harold Carey answered the alarm, he met the same fate. However, before giving up his life in the performance of his duty, the patrolman succeeded in seriously wounding the desperado. A trail of blood left by the fugitive on the stairs leading up to the roof over which he made

good his escape seems to confirm this. He's still at large but probably won't be for long. Watch out for this man, he's dangerous."

"Not if you leave him alone, let him get to that train," Paine thought ruefully. He eyed the suddenly rigid silhouette in front of him. "I'll have to do something about him—now—I guess."

It had come through at a bad time for the driver. Some of the main driveways through the park were heavily trafficked and pretty well lighted. He could have got help from another car. But it happened to come through while they were on a dark, lonely byway with not another machine in sight. Around the next turn the bypass rejoined one of the heavy-traffic arteries. You could hear the hum of traffic.

"Pull over here," Paine ordered. He'd had the gun out. He was only going to clip him with it, stun him and tie him up until after eight twenty.

You could tell by the way the driver pulled his breath in short that he'd been wise to Paine ever since the news flash had only been waiting until they got near one of the exits or got a red light. He braked. Then suddenly he bolted out, tried to duck into the underbrush.

Paine had to get him and get him fast, or he'd get word to the park division. They'd cork up the entrances on him. He knew he couldn't get out and go after him. He pointed low, tried to hit him in the foot or leg, just bring him down.

The driver had tripped over something, gone flat, a moment ahead of the trigger fall. The bullet must have ploughed into his back instead. He was inert when Paine got out to him, but still alive. Eyes open, as though his nerve centers had been paralyzed.

He could hardly stand up himself, but he managed to drag him over to the cab and somehow got him in. He took the cap and put it on his own head.

He could drive—or at least he'd been able to before he was dying. He got under the wheel and took the machine slowly on its way. The sound of the shot must have been lost out in the open, or else mistaken for a backfire; the stream of traffic was rolling obliviously by when he slipped into it unnoticed. He left it again at the earliest opportunity, turned off at the next dark, empty lane that offered itself.

He stopped once more, made his way to the back door to see how the cabman was. He wanted to help him in some

way if he could. Maybe leave him in front of a hospital.

It was too late. The driver's eyes were closed. He was already dead by this time.

Five.

It didn't have any meaning any more. After all, to the dying death is nothing. "I'll see you again in an hour or so," he said.

He got the driver's coat off him and shrouded him with it, to keep the pale gleam of his face from peering up through the gloom of the cab's interior, in case anyone got too close to the window. He was unequal to the task of getting him out again and leaving him behind in the park. The lights of some passing car might have picked him up too soon. And it seemed more fitting to let him rest in his own cab, anyway.

It was ten to eight now. He'd better start for the station. He might be held up by lights on the way, and the train only stopped a few minutes at the uptown station.

He had to rejoin the main stream of traffic to get out of the park. He hugged the outside of the driveway and trundled along. He went off the road several times. Not because he couldn't drive, but because his senses fogged. He pulled himself and the cab out of it each time.

"Train, eight twenty," he waved before his mind like a red lantern. But like a spend-thrift he was using up years of his life in minutes, and pretty soon he was going to run short.

Once an alarm car passed him, shrieking by, taking a short cut through the park from one side of the city to the other. He wondered if they were after him. He didn't wonder very hard. Nothing mattered much any more. Only eight twenty—train—

He kept folding up slowly over the wheel and each time it touched his chest the machine would swerve crazily as though it felt the pain, too. Twice, three times, his fenders were grazed, and he heard faint voices swearing at him from another world, the world he was leaving behind. He wondered if they'd call him names like that if they knew he was dying.

Another thing: he couldn't maintain a steady flow of pressure on the accelerator. The pressure would die out each time, as when current is failing, and the machine would begin drifting to a stop. This happened just as he was leaving the park, crossing the big circular exit plaza. It was controlled by lights and he stalled on a green out in the middle. There was a cop in control on a platform. The cop

shot the whistle out of his own mouth blowing it so hard at him. He nearly flung himself off the platform waving him on.

Paine just sat there, helpless.

The cop was coming over to him, raging like a lion. Paine wasn't afraid because of what the back of his cab held; he was long past that kind of fear. But if this cop did anything to keep him from that 8:20 train—

He reached down finally, gripped his own leg by the ankle, lifted it an inch or two clear of the floor, let it fall back again, and the cab started. It was ludicrous. But then some of the aspects of death often are.

The cop let him go, only because to have detained him longer would have created a worse traffic snarl than there was already.

He was nearly there now. Just a straight run crosstown, then a short one north. It was good he remembered this, because he couldn't see the street signs any more. Sometimes the buildings seemed to lean over above him as though they were about to topple down on him. Sometimes he seemed to be climbing a steep hill, where he knew there wasn't any. But he knew that was just because he was swaying around in the driver's seat.

The same thing happened again a few blocks farther on,

directly in front of a large, swank apartment house, just as the doorman came flying out blowing a whistle. He'd caught hold of Paine's rear door and swung it wide before the latter could stop him, even though the cab was still rolling. Two women in evening dress came hurrying out of the entrance behind him.

"No—taken," Paine kept trying to say. He was too weak to make his voice heard, or else they ignored it. And he couldn't push his foot down for a moment.

The nearer woman shrieked, "Hurry, Mother. Donald'll never forgive me. I promised him seven thirty—"

She got one foot on the cab doorstep. Then she just stood there transfixed. She must have seen what was inside; it was better lighted here than in the park.

Paine tore the cab away from her, open door and all, left her standing there petrified, out in the middle of the street in her long white satin gown, staring after him. She was too stunned even to scream.

And then he got there at last. He got a momentary respite, too. Things cleared a little. Like the lights going up in a theatre when the show is over, before the house darkens for the night.

The uptown station was built-in under a viaduct that carried the overhead tracks across the city streets. He couldn't stop in front of it; no parking was allowed. And there were long lines of cabs on both sides of the no-parking zone. He turned the corner into the little dead-end alley that separated the viaduct from the adjoining buildings. There was a side entrance to the station looking out on it.

Four minutes. It was due in another four minutes. It had already left downtown, was on its way, hurtling somewhere between the two points. He thought, "I better get started. I may have a hard time making it." He wondered if he could stand up at all.

Two minutes. It was coming in overhead, he could hear it rumbling and ticking along the steel viaduct, then sighing to a long-drawn-out stop.

That sidewalk looked awfully wide, from the cab door to the station entrance. He brought up the last dregs of vitality in him, broke away from the cab, started out, zigzagging and going down lower at the knees every minute. The station door helped pull him up straight again. He got into the waiting room, and it was so big he knew he'd never be able to cross it.

One minute left. So near and yet so far.

The starter was calling it already. "Montreal express—eight twenty!—Pittsfield, Burlington, Rouse's Point, Montreal! Bo-o-oaard!"

There were rows of lengthwise benches at hand and they helped him bridge the otherwise insuperable length of the waiting room. He dropped into the outside seat in the first row, pulled himself together a little, scrambled five seats over, toppled into that; repeated the process until he was within reach of the ticket barrier. But time was going, the train was going, life was going fast.

Forty-five seconds left. The last dilatory passengers had already gone up. There were two ways of getting up, a long flight of stairs and an escalator.

He wavered toward the escalator, made it. He wouldn't have been able to get by the ticket taker but for his hackman's cap—an eventuality he and Pauline hadn't foreseen.

"Just meeting a party," he mumbled almost unintelligibly, and the slow treadmill started to carry him up.

A whistle blew upstairs on the track platform. Axles and wheel-bases gave a preliminary creak of motion.

It was all he could do to keep his feet even on the

escalator. There wasn't anyone in back of him, and if he once went over he was going to go plunging all the way down to the bottom of the long chute. He dug his nails into the ascending hand-belts at both sides, hung on like grim life.

There was a hubbub starting up outside on the street somewhere. He could hear a cop's whistle blowing.

A voice shouted: "Which way'd he go?"

Another answered: "I seen him go in the station."

They'd at last found what was in the cab.

A moment after the descending waiting-room ceiling had cut off his view, he heard a spate of running feet come surging in down there from all directions. But he had no time to think of that now. He was out on the open platform upstairs at last. Cars were skimming silkily by. A vestibule door was coming with a conductor just lifting himself into it. Paine went toward it, body low, one arm straight out.

He gave a wordless cry. The conductor turned, saw him. There was a tug, and he was suddenly sprawled inside on the vestibule floor. The conductor gave him a scathing look, pulled the folding steps in after him, slammed the door.

Too late, a cop, a couple of

redcaps, a couple of taxi drivers, came spilling out of the escalator shed. He could hear them yelling a car-length back. The trainmen back there wouldn't open the doors. Suddenly the long, lighted platform snuffed out and the station was gone.

They probably didn't think they'd lost him, but they had. Sure, they'd phone ahead, they'd stop the train to have him taken off at Harmon, where it changed from electricity to coal power. But they wouldn't get him. He wouldn't be on it. Just his body.

Each man knows when he's going to die; he knew he wouldn't even live for five minutes.

He went staggering down a long, brightly lighted aisle. He could hardly see their faces any more. But she'd know him; it'd be all right. The aisle ended, and he had to cross another vestibule. He fell down on his knees.

He squirmed up again somehow, got into the next car.

He was nearly at the end, he could see another vestibule coming. Or maybe that was the door to eternity. Suddenly, from the last seat of all, a hand darted out and claimed him, and there was Pauline's face looking anxiously up at him. He dropped heavily down into the

empty outside seat beside her.

"You were going to pass right by," she whispered.

"I couldn't see you clearly, the lights are flickering so."

She looked up at them in surprise, as though for her they were steady.

"I kept my word," he breathed. "I made the train. But oh, I'm tired—and now I'm going to sleep." He started to slip over sideways toward her. His head dropped onto her lap.

She had been holding her handbag on it, and his fall displaced it. It dropped to the floor, opened, and everything in it spilled out around her feet.

His glazing eyes opened for one last time and centered feebly on the little packet of bills, with a rubber band around them, that had rolled out with everything else.

"Pauline, all that money—where'd you get that much? I only gave you enough to buy the train tickets—"

"Burroughs gave it to me. It's the two hundred and fifty we were talking about for so long. I knew in the end you'd never go near him and ask for it, so I went to him myself—last night right after you left the house. He handed it over willingly, without a word. I tried to tell you that this morning, but you wouldn't let me mention his name . . ."

Anthony Gilbert

The Dove and the Hawk

In many of her short stories Anthony Gilbert writes what might be called the "pure" crime story, with the police (and amateur detectives) completely offstage. This point of view is an excellent change of pace from the "pure" detective story, procedural or traditional. Yet Anthony Gilbert's stories always remain traditional in one way—in the highest tradition of British crime writing. American writers handle "pure" crime differently—but there is much to be said in praise of the British style . . .

PENELOPE CAME INTO my life when I was 21. She was my father's child by his second wife, more like a niece than a half sister, and for years she called me Aunt Helen.

I'll never forget the night I first set eyes on her mother.

As a rule I spent my holidays in London with my Aunt Olive—I was an only child—while my father went to his beloved mountains; but that year I developed a sudden sharp attack of influenza and had to stay at home. On the fifth evening, when my temperature was rapidly subsiding, I heard a sudden commotion in the hall and crept out of bed to find out what was going on. To my amazement I saw my father in the hall and with him a girl of

about my own age, whom I'd certainly never seen before. My father looked up and saw me. He was a handsome, unpredictable, undemonstrative man.

"What on earth are you doing here, Helen? Why aren't you in London?"

I murmured something apologetic about influenza, but before I could finish, the girl came running up the stairs.

"You're Helen," she said. "Oh, isn't it lovely for me that you should be here? There's so much to learn and you'll know all the answers. You must think of me as a sister, never as a stepmother. Ugh!" She pulled her lovely mouth into a grimace.

I was gawky with amazement. She was never to my

thinking quite so beautiful as her daughter, Penelope, was to be, but at that time she was the loveliest creature I had ever seen. Like a living beam of sunlight—and for some incredible reason she had wanted to marry a man 30 years her senior. It took me a long time to realize that she was in love with him, and she stayed in love with him all her life. She was a small woman, neatly formed as a bird, dark and glowing—like a beam of a living sun.

"You'd better go back to bed, Helen," my father said. "Jenny, my dear, be careful. Influenza can be very infectious."

"He's right—you must go back," Jenny told me. "I'll come and talk to you."

I don't know where she learned her skills, but within five minutes our glowering Mrs. Mopp had turned into a ministering angel and was bringing me cold drinks and a fresh hot-water bottle.

"What a homecoming!" I said shakily. "But no one told me..."

"I know. It was awful of us. I knew we ought to cable you, and you could have flown out or something, but I thought—suppose she feels she can't share him—I wouldn't blame you a bit. Darling Peregrine!"

I realized dazedly she was

talking about my unapproachable father.

"But it'll be all right, you'll see. I shan't take your place, just pop into an empty room in his life. Tell me about your mother. It must have been dreadful for you when she died."

Jenny was right, as always. During the year I lived on at home I was never once asked to have a tray in my room when company came; she took over the reins of office by degrees and so unobtrusively that I hardly realized they were slipping out of my hands.

At the year's end my father said, "It's time you thought of your own future, Helen, my dear." He'd become kinder since his second marriage; Jenny softened everything she touched. "You've great potentialities. It occurred to me you might like to take a secretarial course. There are excellent openings, and, I believe, a great shortage of competent young women. If you manage an employer as well as you managed this house you should go far."

His idea was that I should occupy Aunt Olive's spare room in London, but Jenny put a stop to that.

"Darling, do have a heart," I heard her say. "Helen's young, she wants some fun, not just a

collection of Aunt Olive's grisly old bores. And you know you've never really done anything for her."

"I brought you into the family," he said simply. "She's had a year with you under the same roof."

He explained he'd make me an allowance until I was trained. I'd come into some money from my mother when I was 25, and after that I should be able to make my own way.

Aunt Olive found me a bed-sitting room in a rather dingy but respectable street and had me enrolled in London's most famous secretarial college. I loved it from the start. Sitting in an office, keeping books, arranging appointments—it was like housekeeping all over again but with a much wider scope. At that stage I didn't envisage the Helen Bryce Employment and Secretarial Agency—head-quarters in London and two provincial branches, all doing very nicely, thank you—but I knew in my bones I was bound to succeed. I wrote to tell my father, but he'd lost interest in me by now, because Jenny was going to have a baby. This time, he was convinced, it would be a boy.

But it wasn't. It was another girl whom they christened Penelope. I saw her when she was two weeks old. I suppose

she wasn't really beautiful then—they can't be at that age—but from the moment I set eyes on her, Jenny occupied a second place in my heart. It was a form of "love at first sight."

It says a lot for Penelope that before she was two she had reconciled her father to her disappointing sex. She captivated everyone wherever she went. Strangely, I never connected her closely with my father—as well, I thought, expect a toad to hatch out a butterfly. She was just the zenith of the miracles that Jenny had worked on our dull, uncheerful house.

The child took to me from the first. By this time I accepted the fact that I was unlikely to marry. I was doing well at my job, and my prospects were bright. When Penelope was five Jenny said one day, "If anything should happen to me, Helen, you'd look after Penelope, wouldn't you? Even in the grave I wouldn't worry if I knew she was with you."

Second sight? I don't know. Anyway, nothing did happen for several years. Except in my career. As soon as I came into my inheritance I bought a partnership with a Miss Carless, who ran a secretarial bureau. We were doing well and would do better.

Three years later Miss Carless had a stroke and I bought her out. When she died a year later, I turned the concern into the Helen Bryce Agency. They say a recommendation from me goes a long way to help a girl to get a particular job.

When Penelope was 14 the blow fell. Both her parents were killed in a plane crash over the Alps. Under my father's will she became a ward of court. There was a good deal of money involved and practically everything was left to her. My Aunt Olive had died two years previously, so I was her only living relative.

Mr. Prendergast, the lawyer, hemmed and ha-ed a bit when I said Penelope's home would henceforth be with me. She had just started boarding school, but she'd need a place for the holidays. I was my own boss by now, could fix my holidays as I chose, so Penelope wouldn't be neglected; but I should see to it, too, that she didn't lack companionship of her own age. What settled the question was the child herself.

"I shall go to Aunt Helen," she said. "It's what Mother wanted."

I had recently bought a house in the suburbs. I furnished the top floor as a sort of flat, remembering how much I'd longed for privacy at

Penelope's age. She had her own bathroom and sitting room, where she could entertain her friends, and there was a sofa if she wanted to invite them to stay over. But she had the run of the whole house.

She was up in that flat less than I anticipated. I had dreamed of her joining me when she started work—she could be a junior executive in no time, and no nonsense about nepotism, but Penelope wouldn't hear of it.

"I wouldn't be any good at it. If I was anyone else you'd give me the sack in a week. Besides, I've sort of promised Marjorie to join her—she's starting a shop for kookie clothes. She thinks I could model and perhaps design."

"But you don't know anything about clothes," I protested.

"Darling, everyone knows about clothes."

I wasn't in love with the idea. The Cochranes were a young couple embarking on a rather hazardous enterprise with inadequate capital. Penelope was 18, and when she was 21 she'd be a very rich young woman. I was resolved not to be coaxed into putting any money into the concern.

"All right," said Penelope, disappointed, "but it would be a very good investment."

"If they're solvent at the end of a year I'll reconsider," I promised.

"If they're solvent at the end of a year they won't need it."

She didn't stay with me long after she started the job. She didn't make any excuses about difficulty of transportation, or anything like that; she just said she wanted to share a flat with a girl she knew. I hid my disappointment—after all, I hadn't wanted to live with my aunt when I was her age, and aunts are aunts the world over. The funny thing was, that was how I thought of her—as my niece rather than my half sister, though about this time she stopped calling me Aunt Helen. But all her friends—the few I met, that is—all assumed I was her aunt and neither of us bothered to correct them.

Penelope moved out the following week. Secretly I thought her new flat deplorable and the morals of her friend pretty dubious, but I had the wit to say nothing. After a time she moved casually into another flat in Regent's Park, where I went once or twice by invitation. But though she still came to see me, nothing would induce her to bring her companions.

"Darling, you're so efficient they'd be terrified. They'd think you square."

She'd been at work for about a year when Tim Driscoll loomed on her horizon.

Loomed? He leaped, he bounded, he was as sudden as Jenny must have seemed to my father. I met him of all places at Penelope's bedside. She had been involved in a car accident, of which she made pretty light. "Darling Helen"—it was Jenny over again—"your generation does fuss so. Just be grateful for our wonderful Health Service—it won't cost us a penny."

When I arrived with a basket of fruit and some flowers, I found her looking like Pallas Athene, arising out of a sea of flowers, cards, books, bottles of perfume, and chocolates—there was hardly any room for her in the bed. But my eyes were all for Tim. He was a dark vital man, oozing with that unscrupulous charm that sweeps young girls off their feet, and a good many older women, too. I knew he was no good to Penelope the instant I set eyes on him; but I knew, too, I was going to have the hardest job of my life persuading Penelope of this. He was 30, at least, and I wouldn't be surprised to know there were broken marriages behind him.

Penelope held out her hand. "Helen darling, this is Tim. We're in love." She might have been introducing the Archangel Gabriel.

"How are you, Aunt Helen?" Which was absurd, for there were only a few years between us. "Don't tell me you don't like Irishmen, but how about the Englishman's sense of fair play? When I was a boy there was a man who lived on the corner, kept a few pigs, and in bad weather you could hardly tell the pigs from the muck they wallowed in. He put up a notice. 'Don't judge the pigs by the sty, but wait till you get the flavor of the bacon.' You get the message—Aunt Helen?"

Penelope watched him with adoration in her eyes. She seemed to throw her love over him in handfuls, so that he glittered in consequence.

"I knew how it would be." Tim Driscoll turned to her with an air of comic dismay. "Your aunt doesn't think I'm good enough for you. Well, that's one thing we can agree on right away. But where on earth are you going to find the man who is?"

I thought he would realize that I wanted a little time alone with Penelope, but he made no move. He carried on a conversation practically nonstop.

"What a girl! She's so popular, her visitors come in droves. I have to act as a sort of social secretary and space them out."

He looked at me impudently, as if to suggest I ought to have made an appointment, but I wasn't having any of that.

"There are a few things I want to talk to you about, Penelope," I announced, and even he couldn't pretend not to notice that.

"I can take a hint," he said. "Now don't let Aunt Helen put you against me, sweetie." But he had no fears of that. The child was completely under his spell.

"Where did you meet him?" I asked Penelope, when we were alone.

"At the races."

"I didn't know you were a gambler."

"Aren't we all? Helen, you *must* like him. He's nervous about you—that's why he tried to sound so confident. He's terrified you'll try and break it up."

"Why should he suppose I'd want to do that?"

"Well—you might think he was too old, for one thing."

"He is. He'll never see thirty again."

"He's thirty-four. My mother was twenty when she got married, and my father was fifty. You're not going to try to tell me that wasn't a success. Why, everything I know about love I learned from her—until I met Tim, of course. I knew it

was right the first minute we met—it was like the sun coming out.”

“I didn’t know your sun had ever gone in.”

“Well, not the ordinary sun. But this was different. This was—well, like a radiance, the light that never was on sea or land. If you’re not going to like him it’ll be the first barrier there’s ever been between us. Because I could never give him up—never.”

“How long have you known him?”

“What difference does that make?”

“I suppose you’re not thinking of getting married right away? You’re barely twenty.”

“Why waste time? Oh, you’re thinking about me being a minor, but I’m sure the courts wouldn’t object, even if it got that far. Not if you said you approved. And you must. You’ve always put my happiness ahead of everything, even your beloved business. I used to wonder if I could ever love anyone as much as that. Now, of course . . .”

Her smile finished the sentence. She meant that now, of course, she had outstripped me, that I could never hope to catch up.

He was there the next time I went, though I’d written in

advance this time. I wondered what kind of job he had that he could turn up on an afternoon. Penelope was as sweet as ever, but I realized she had started to move away from me, and wouldn’t be coming back.

It was somehow like being on an island just offshore—I could see what was going on, I could wave, and she could wave back, but there was that implacable sea between us.

Some young things came piling in when I’d been there about fifteen minutes—one worked in a coffee bar, one was on the stage, none of her friends seemed to have steady jobs or regular hours—and the gulf between us perceptibly widened.

Mind you, they were charming, they glowed in a way I don’t remember youth glowing when I was a girl, as if they lived in a blaze of perpetual sunlight. They accepted Tim as casually as if he’d been a poodle or a Persian cat, someone belonging exclusively to Penelope, but on show just the same. I came away feeling about 80, and cold, as though I’d been sitting in a howling draft.

The following time Tim brought me back in his car. It was a handsome affair, a red Alvis with a hood twice the size of the chassis. He drove well, I’ll say that for him, but in a

manner I can only describe as anti-social. Like most women drivers, I have a great sense of what I owe to my fellow drivers, but Tim was absolutely ruthless.

When we reached my door I asked him in—conversation had been impossible en route—and gave him a whiskey and soda. I wasn't going to waste my good sherry on him.

"I want you to tell me something, Mr. Driscoll," I said.

"Tim. After all, I call you Aunt Helen."

"Very premature of you," I snapped.

"It's no good, you know—you're not going to break us up," he warned me. "If you insist on a tug of war, I promise you there isn't a bookmaker between here and John o' Groats who'd give you evens."

"You do realize Penelope's a minor?"

"Of course. But I don't think even you would invoke the law. At best you could only get the wedding postponed, and at worst—well, it wouldn't do you any good."

"Strangely enough," I told him, "it's not my good I'm thinking of."

"People have such filthy minds, don't they. And an old maid—forgive me, Aunt Helen, but we have got the gloves off, haven't we?—who tries to stop a

girl from getting married—well, jealousy has an ugly name."

"Jealousy!" I exclaimed. I couldn't stop myself. "What! Of you?"

I got him under the skin there, though he kept his temper. "Of her happiness," he said.

"I wish I could be persuaded it lies in your hands. But I wanted to ask you something, didn't I? I'm her only living relative. Are you in a position to support a wife?"

"Pen and I'll get by," he said.

"That's what I'm wondering. You see, she can't touch her money till she's twenty-one."

"You think that's the only reason I'm marrying her, isn't that so? Well, for your information I have a business of my own."

It turned out that the business consisted of a riding school in some place unnamed—Surrey, he finally said airily, when I pressed him. It hadn't been going long, but it would grow. Eventually—when he could lay hands on Penelope's money, I suppose—he intended to branch out, to breed his own horses. Blood stock, he said, and with the export market being what it was, there should be a packet in it.

"Oh, no doubt," I agreed. "But it costs a packet to get

started. Stud fees are pretty heavy, and you can't breed from inferior animals."

He gestured toward the decanter. "May I?" But he didn't wait for an answer.

"If there's one thing I do know about it's horses," he went on. "I don't say we shall be millionaires from the start, but—well, it's like having a kid. At first you have to carry him about, but one day he may turn into the prizefighter of his time."

"I hope," I said drily, "your business is a little older than that."

"And, of course," he said, "Pen will keep on with her job to begin with. It's what she wants. Well, it would be ridiculous to throw her chances away."

"Penelope will want children," I assured him bluntly.

"Naturally. In due course. Look, Aunt Helen, why can't we be friends? We both love Pen. I'm going to marry her—make up your mind to that. If you think she's making such a bad bargain I'd have expected you to stick closer than ever."

"Oh, you could charm a hippopotamus out of its pool on a hot day," I acknowledged. "Unfortunately for you, I'm not a hippopotamus."

"That could be an advantage

to me." His manner was as smooth as cream. "I've always heard hippos can do a lot of damage."

All the same, I had enough sense to know that I had been wasting my breath.

As soon as she left the hospital, Penelope spent every spare minute looking at apartments.

"I thought Tim's riding stables or whatever they are were out of London," I said.

"They are, of course, but he can commute. I have to be on the spot." She seemed to do about a fourteen-hour day. "What do you mean by 'whatever they are'? Don't you believe they exist?"

Well, if they did I was pretty sure they weren't registered in his name. He might be a riding-master, but by temperament and profession he was a gambler, and that's no foundation for married life with a girl like Penelope. Now and again he might hit the jackpot and they'd unroll the red carpet, but the rest of the time Penelope would, as they say, "carry the can." I knew she'd be far too proud to let me help her, once she became Mrs. Driscoll.

I was pretty busy myself that summer. I was opening my second provincial office, and there'd been some tiresome

setbacks. I was away from London a lot, but at last everything was ironed out. It was a Saturday when I started back to London.

I don't believe in predestination, a set pattern arranged by some invisible and inscrutable Deity, absolving us from personal responsibility. People have to answer for their own actions. But I do agree that chance plays a big part. If Jenny hadn't gone to Switzerland that summer, her first visit—if Penelope hadn't gone to the races—if I hadn't stopped at St. Aubyn Racecourses that afternoon on sheer impulse, all our lives would be different.

I hadn't intended to stop—I didn't even realize there was a racecourse there—but going past I saw there was a big meeting that afternoon. I had time on my hands, so I parked my car and bought a ticket. That was the first and last time in my life I felt any sympathy with Tim Driscoll.

I've always wanted perfection—in my office, in my work. You don't get it, of course, but you do aim for it, and it seemed to me that these splendid horses had achieved it. The noble carriage, the rolling eye, the velvet coats, the sheer majesty of them—oh, I could see how they'd appeal to a gambler like Tim Driscoll. Or did he only see

them, as I was convinced he saw Penelope, as a source of personal profit?

Since I didn't expect to come a second time I decided to complete the experiment by making a few bets. I chose four horses haphazard, and backed them to place. Three of the four came home. I wasn't triumphant. I was horrified. If a month's pay could be gleaned in an afternoon under such thrilling circumstances, how could I expect a go-getter like Tim to turn his hand to honest work?

I decided not to stay for the last race, but get away before the roads were jammed with traffic. I went into the refreshment tent for a cup of tea that I was disgusted to find was being served in paper cups. The tent was packed—I didn't see how I'd ever manage to get my cup to my mouth. And, in fact, I never did. I was trying to maneuver a little space when I heard a voice behind me that turned me rigid.

I didn't have to turn to see who it was. I'd have known that voice if it had spoken beside my grave.

"But, darling," it coaxed, "I promise you it won't make any difference to us, none whatsoever."

I heard a woman's laugh. "What do you mean, no

difference? You'll be a married man, won't you?"

I couldn't see the speaker, but it didn't matter. I'd heard that particular voice before, and other voices exactly like it. They came into my office—the greedy ones, the What's-in-it-for-Walter ones, to whom scruple isn't even a word in the dictionary.

"So what?" Tim demanded. "I've got business all over the country, haven't I? I'm not tied to an office desk. And Pen's no camp follower. Anyway, she's got her own job."

The blatancy of it, the crudeness and cruelty of it, made me sick. But Penelope's innocence was no match for a woman like this—the dove and the hawk, I thought, and the hawk knows no pity.

"But if she finds out—"

"Why should she? Even your husband hasn't a suspicion—after four years."

"Lucky for you. If he had he'd clap a divorce on me before you could wink. Would you marry me, if he did?"

"Flo, don't be absurd."

There was a warning note of impatience in Tim's voice. I could read the situation easily enough. He was one of those men who command women's love but never give it back—because he has no love to give. Pitiful? Perhaps. But it would

take a more Christian woman than I am to spare compassion for such a rogue.

"If you got divorced," Tim went on brutally, "you couldn't even get alimony, and Teddy's such a vengeful type he'd probably claim fantastic damages. No, we're far better off as we are. Oh, darling, don't be like that. It's worked for four years—it'll be all right, you'll see."

"I suppose she's over the moon for you?" cried the jealous voice.

"Well, darling . . ."

I couldn't have moved if my life had depended on it. I found I was crushing the horrible paper cup till the tea spurted over the front of my dress. I've never been a violent type, but I understood in that moment how a person armed with a flickknife or even a stone will employ direct action, on impulse, with reason driven out of the mind.

"If I thought you cared for her," began Flo slowly, and Tim laughed.

"Darling, she's a kid, a cute kid, but I've always preferred my women grown up. You'd love her, Flo—a sweet little innocent."

That was a bit thick, even for him. "Don't be a bloody fool," said the woman roughly. "I hate her before I've even

seen her. If you're sensible you'll keep her out of my way. All right, Tim, if that's the situation, come round tonight. Teddy's away on some conference—I suppose you're not spending your *nights* with Little Miss Muffet yet?"

"I can't see you tonight, angel. I'm booked for dinner. As a matter of fact, we have to be damn careful for the next few weeks. That grisly horror of an aunt—well, she's a half sister really—would smash us if she had half an opportunity, and I can't afford to pass up a chance like this, not even for you."

"Tomorrow night then?"

"I'll ring you," he said. "You can count on me, darling."

His voice dripped butter all over the place. I was afraid he might see me, but he didn't even turn his head.

"You'd better not forget," said Flo. "You're betting on lives now, Tim, not just horseflesh."

If I'd been capable of even a shred of pity I'd have been sorry for her. She might be worthless, but this was love all right, the agonizing love that isn't sure of the object of its affections. In a way you could say she loved him even more than Penelope did—because she saw his rottenness, and she didn't care.

"Don't fret," Tim told her. "I have to keep sweetie pie happy for all our sakes. Even being seen here together is risky. You know what people are like—they have tongues for more than licking ice cream. And if it came to dear old Auntie's ears, she'd somehow lay hands on a poison dart and send it to me in an envelope with Happy Birthday written on it, and she's so bloody clever she'd have fourteen alibis at the inquest to prove it couldn't be her."

He was right about that, too. I caught sight of him as he moved away, saying, "Can't miss the last race. I've got something on Falconer. Let's hope he changes the luck or I'll be in Queer Street before I reach the altar."

Off he went, as graceful as one of the horses he loved. I really believe he loved horses, as it wasn't in him to love a woman.

When he was gone I ground my paper cup underfoot and went along to the cloakroom to bathe my burning face and make some repairs. I had the room to myself. People had either gone off already or were packing the rails for the start of the last race.

I looked like a glowing ember of a woman—it was as if in five minutes I'd aged 25

years. Somehow, I knew, I had to find some way to save Penelope from a future of humiliation and despair.

There were a number of gaps in the car park ranks when I arrived. I showed the attendant my ticket and went in. I was looking for a red Alvis, and it wasn't hard to find. It was typical of Tim that he hadn't even bothered to lock up the car.

I opened the door and put my bag on the seat. Then I lifted the hood. If anyone had seen me I'd have been an owner checking some trifling fault, but on occasions like these you're never truly *seen*. I only had a few minutes before the last race would be over, and I had to be away before Tim appeared.

Fortunately, I've always been independent. I'm a good mechanic, I can paper a wall, mend an electric socket, change a tire in record time. What I had to do now didn't take long, and by the time I had driven my own car out of the park I had insured that Penelope's marriage to Tim Driscoll would never take place.

The odd thing was, I felt perfectly calm. As I saw it, my first duty was to Jenny's child. I'd tried everything else; this, it seemed to me—only I didn't phrase it in such a hifalutin fashion—was the love that is

faithful unto death—in this case, Tim's death. But if it had involved mine it wouldn't have made any difference.

The cars were moving out fairly regularly now, and I was just one of a crowd. I had no fear of detection—everyone knew I never went near a racecourse; besides, I'd placed my bets on the tote, so there were no records, and I destroyed my car park ticket a quarter of a mile away from the course.

It's a funny thing, but I never really thought about Flo. When you play chess, which is one of my relaxations, you know you may have to sacrifice a pawn to guard your queen. Flo was just one of the pawns.

I slept quite peacefully that night. Next morning was Sunday, and I came down a little later than usual to collect my papers. There was nothing in the two literary ones, but the *Echo* had the full story. There was even a photograph of the scene of the disaster. Wherever I look these days, I see that story in letters of flame.

FATAL CRASH NEAR ST. AUBYN'S

Mr. Tim Driscoll, a well-known racing enthusiast, was killed instantaneously when his Alvis car went out of control as

he was returning from the races yesterday evening. With Mr. Driscoll was his fiancée, Miss Penelope Bryce, who was also killed.

You've heard the phrase—time stood still. Time stopped for me that morning—I can't even be certain how long ago.

How was I to guess that it was Penelope, and not Flo whom he had brought with him? The meeting with Flo in the tea tent might have been just a chance—or, more likely, Flo's jealousy had driven her there, perhaps to catch a glimpse of her rival.

I was brought up to believe in the immortal spirit of man. Eternity's a terrifying thought—time without end, a road that goes on and on and presumably leads you somewhere in the end.

It won't be like that for me. My share of eternity is approximately 18 hours—between teatime on a Saturday afternoon and ten o'clock the next morning. The wheel turns and I turn with it; the clock moves from four to ten, from four to ten, and back again, always back again. And on that wheel I'll go round and round and round—forever and ever.

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John and Ward Hawkins

The Killer Is Loose

Sam Wagner was a cop—a good cop. He and Lila had been married ten years—the good years of their lives with better ones coming up. For Lila was going to have a baby, their first, and Sam's son—oh, yes, they were sure it would be a boy. But—Lila was a worry bird, first grade with citations, and she cared for Sam, had built her life around him. But there were times when caring too much meant worrying too much . . . and now a murderer had escaped from prison, and he had only one idea fixed in his deranged mind—to kill . . . a gripping, heart-clutching novelet . . .

Detective: SAM WAGNER

SAM WAGNER WAS dreaming when the telephone rang. He was sitting in a blind in duck heaven and the mallards were coming in, settling over the decoys, when the shrill ringing called him home to the bedroom on Montgomery Street. He pawed blindly at the bedside table and found the telephone.

"Yeah," he said. "Wagner here."

"Sergeant Baxer, Sam. You awake?"

Sam Wagner threw the covers back and put his feet on the floor. He peered at the luminous face of the clock. Two a.m.

"Now I'm awake," he said. "Go ahead."

"Leon Poole took a walk," Baxer said. "The chief thought you ought to know. He told me to call you."

"Leon Poole," Sam Wagner said. "How'd he do it?"

"He was a trusty on the honor farm. One of the guards took him along as a helper on a truck, late this afternoon. The truck never got to town. Took 'em a while to find it."

"The guard?"

"Dead. Poole put a knife in his throat."

After a moment, Sam said, "Any sign of Poole?"

"Not yet. He ditched the

truck fifteen miles this side of Winston. The state and county boys are out in force. They want him bad, Sam. That guard was a cold-blooded piece of work."

"Anything I can do?"

"No. Chief wanted you to know, that's all. You put Poole in the pen. Sit tight, he says. Keep a sharp eye."

"Okay," Sam said. "Thanks for calling."

He sat on the edge of the bed, listening to the wind rip through the fir trees that stood behind the house. Rain slashed at the windows. The storm the papers had been talking about had finally arrived.

"Sam," Lila said, "who was that?"

The telephone had awakened her. Sam rubbed the back of his neck and shuffled his feet on the cold floor. He thought if Don Ameche had had a wife like Lila—nervous and a fretful sleeper—he would never have invented the telephone. For Lila, a ring in the night always signaled a major calamity.

"Sergeant Baxer," he said. "A trusty got loose from the state honor farm. The chief thought I ought to know."

"Why?"

"Because I'm a cop," Sam said. "It's part of my work to know about things like that. Tomorrow's work." He swung

his feet back into bed, leaned over, found her nose and twisted it gently. "Remember your condition," he told her. "Plenty of rest, the doc says. Now turn it off and go back to sleep."

He put his head on the pillow. Beside him, Lila moved restlessly. Lila was good people, his one true love—ten years of married life had sold him on that a million times. But she was a worry bird, first class. Give her a big item like what dress to wear and she could fret herself into a pink tizzy. Give her a cop for a husband and she really—

She sat up beside him. "Sam, I'm hungry."

"You had a big dinner."

"I don't care," she said. "I'm hungry again." When he didn't respond, she said, "We're hungry."

"Unfair tactics," he said. "You're ganging up on me."

"Would you deny your son nourishment?"

"Five months before he gets here," Sam said, "and he's already got an appetite like a horse. Better send him back. I don't think I'm gonna be able to afford him."

"Sam," she said, "we're hungry."

He threw the covers back. "Hot chocolate and cinnamon toast," he said. "Comin' up."

He found his robe and slippers and went through the house to the kitchen. He put a pan of milk on the stove. He covered slices of bread with butter, sugar, and cinnamon and put them in the oven.

"What a gal," he said.

He was thirty-five, an even six feet tall, hard-fleshed and lean. His hair was close-cropped. He had big rough hands and rangy shoulders. His face was not a gentle face. His cheekbones were prominent, his jaw was taut and narrow, his heavy brows grew almost solidly over his blue eyes. But there was kindness in his eyes. Now worry pulled at the corners of his mouth. He turned to find Lila in the doorway.

"What's this?" he said. "You don't like the service?"

She came into the kitchen, pulling tight the belt of her robe. She was tall and underweight—her pregnancy had yet to add a pound. She had a rather long face and large hazel-brown eyes. A beautiful woman, a sensitive woman and a devoted wife. Sam knew it well.

He knew she had built her life around him, completely and for good, and he called that fine. But there were times when caring too much meant worrying too much.

Take that deal about the

gun. A couple of weeks ago, all of a sudden, she'd blown up a storm because he had to carry a gun to earn a living. So now he got in and out of his shoulder rig in the closet where she couldn't see it.

"Two a.m.'s no time for talk," he said.

"It's Leon Poole, isn't it?"

"You heard me say so."

"And while you were out here I remembered who he is. He's the one—I mean, it was his wife you killed, wasn't it?"

"That's the guy," Sam said.

"I remember seeing him in court." Her lips tightened. "He's dangerous, Sam. Very dangerous."

Sam spread his arms in exasperation. "Dangerous," he said. "To you, even a bicycle thief is lethal. Why don't you be sensible? This guy is nobody."

Lila looked at him steadily. She looked past him, back more than three years, and saw Leon Poole again. In the courtroom. She'd been there because it had been Sam's case, and a big one. Big in the papers, at least, with the wife killed. She saw Poole whisper to his lawyer, saw the lawyer turn and find her, saw Poole turn and find her.

"He frightened me," she said.

It was hard to know why. He hadn't been rough-looking. Soft

was the word for him, a fleshy man of medium height, with plump hands and cheeks. Features almost feminine—straight nose, large long-lashed dark eyes, thick dark hair. His eyes, she thought. His eyes were liquid, steady and staring.

"He was a thief," Sam said. "And not a very good one."

"He says you killed his wife."

"She wound up with three bullets in her," Sam said. "Mine and two others. Which one did it? Nobody knows."

"He says you did it."

"Because he's got to stick it on somebody. Just one man, not three. It was my case. I questioned him, I ran him down. So he chose me for the guy that killed her."

"He said he'd get even."

"Quit it!" Sam leaned stiff-armed on the table. "If you think Poole will get a chance to take a shot at me, you're very mistaken. In the first place, he isn't going to want to. That 'I'll get you for this, copper!' is a lot of blow. We hear it all the time. Nothing comes of it. Second place, he hasn't a chance of staying loose."

"What makes you so sure?"

"Common sense," Sam said.

"He's wearing prison numbers on his back a foot high. He's got no dough, no gun, and he's

afoot. Every cop in the state's looking for him." Sam took his hands off the table and thrust them into the pockets of his robe. "A lot of big tough men try to bust out of Winston. Not one in a thousand gets more than a few miles."

The milk was boiling, the toast was burning. Sam swore, threw it all away, and started over. When he turned to Lila, he found her pale, eyes large and dark.

"Hey, cut it out," he said.

"You know what I'm thinking?"

"I should," he said. "I've seen that look often enough. And I've heard the story often enough, too. You don't want to be a cop's widow. If I loved you as much as you love me, I'd get out of police work."

"You think I'm being selfish?"

"Just the opposite." Sam said it earnestly, meaning and believing every word. "You're gone on me—why I'm that lucky I'll never know. You're scared to death something is going to happen to me. I know you can't any more stop worrying than you can stop breathing. But the answer's still no. I'm not going to quit police work."

"What about him, Sam?"

Lila asked. "There's two of us."

"That's not a clean punch."

"I think it is."

Sam put chocolate and toast on the kitchen table. He did not speak again until he had finished the task. Lila, watching him, knew what he would say. His eyes were stubborn, his brows were pulled down in a line she knew only too well.

"There are thousands and thousands of men in police work," he said. "They live full and satisfying lives—long lives, most of them. Their wives put up with it. Their kids put up with it. You and the lad will have to do the same. I'll do any reasonable thing for you. This is not reasonable. I won't do it."

Lila said, "I'll ask again."

Sam was up at six o'clock. Lila was standing beside the table when he walked into the kitchen. Her eyes were huge. The morning paper was beside his plate, opened on headlines big and black.

"He killed a guard, Sam. You didn't tell me."

"At two a.m.—no, I didn't tell you," he said. "There's nothing to fret about, Lila. They'll get him. A guard's the same as a cop. A cop killer doesn't get away."

"Then cops do get killed?"

Sam wondered if every man was as thickheaded as he was at six in the morning. Cop killer—what a thing to say.

"They'll get him," he said.

His breakfast eggs got cold while he explained how a manhunt was organized. The escape routes were blocked—the main highways, side roads, railroads, rivers. Then the enclosed area was searched, house to house, barn to barn, field to field.

Poole had killed a guard. He'd get the big treatment—bloodhounds, planes, helicopters, cops by the hundred. More than that, every man, woman, and child would be on watch for him. What chance would a man wearing prison clothes have?

"No chance at all," Sam said.

"Some do get through."

"With help," Sam said. "They have a pal waiting at a certain place at a certain time with money, clothes, and transportation. Poole didn't have help. How could he have known the guard was going to take him to town? He saw the chance, grabbed it, and ran. He won't get far."

The doorbell rang. Sam saw the convulsive closing of Lila's hands. For all his talking, he'd done very little good.

"I'll get it," he said.

There were two uniformed cops on the front porch, a prowler car parked at the curb. Sam Wagner knew both of

ficers, Harris and McNamee. They were both veterans, big and competent.

Harris gave Sam a grin. "We're on special duty out here," he said. "We're goin' to keep an eye on the place."

"Poole's still loose then?"

"But not for long. It's coming daylight now."

"Right," Sam said.

Lila was waiting for him in the kitchen, her hands locked at her waist. "Why are they here?" she asked. "What do they want? Sam, please don't lie to me."

"Okay." He put big hands on her shoulders. "If Poole gets through, he might come here. That's about as long as a chance can get, but it's being covered. You see? There's nowhere Poole can go—nowhere—that he won't find cops waiting for him."

"I see," she said.

But her eyes told him she didn't see it the right way. Her eyes told him she had taken about all she was able to take.

"Time I went to work," he said.

Quietly she said, "Goodbye, Sam."

Sam backed his car out of the garage, drove two blocks to the main east-west freeway, and fell in with the stream of early-morning traffic. He found himself thinking of Leon Poole again.

A real odd-ball, that one. Clever as Satan in some ways, very dumb in others. He'd been a building-and-loan teller. He'd rigged a holdup, scheduling it for a time when an unusually large amount of cash was on hand. An accomplice had waved a gun and made off with the loot. A clean score, until it became obvious that only three men had known when the till would be stuffed with money.

An inside job then, clearly. Sam had interrogated and released all three suspects. Leon Poole's telephone had been tapped. Poole, on the second day, had called the accomplice. That one had confessed quickly enough, naming Poole as the man who'd planned the holdup. Sam and two others had gone to make the arrest, and there the simple job had jumped the rails.

Leon Poole had had a gun. The plump man with the round face and big smile had opened fire when he heard the police at his apartment door. He'd put a bullet through the arm of a uniformed officer. They'd gone in after him—what else?

The rest had been unfortunate. They'd thought Poole was alone. Four of the neighbors had seen his wife leave the building. But when it was done, when the fat and weeping man was handcuffed,

Doris Poole, the wife, was dead.

Four of the neighbors had seen her leave the building, none had seen her return. Stalking an armed man through strange, dark rooms is uneasy work. Reflex is faster than thought. Doris Poole had simply appeared in the wrong doorway at the wrong time.

Sam Wagner shook his head. Three years and more, and he could still remember the numb despair of that moment.

But you can't bring a dead woman back to life. And you can't dwell in the past. You have to go on to the next day, and the next. Tough, but there it is. Not heartless, helpless.

Sam parked behind police headquarters. He rode the elevator to the third floor. The bulletin board was on his left. Leon Poole's mug had been posted there. Some face, Sam thought. Dark, long-lashed eyes; dark, rumpled hair; white, plump cheeks; a wide, full mouth. A malleable face. It had been sullen before the police camera, but Sam could remember it reflecting other moods: full of boyish charm and cheer, crumpled and streaked with tears, loose and torn with grief, snarling with hate.

A voice said, "Here early, aren't you, Sam?"

"Only a couple of hours," Sam said.

He turned. This guy he liked: Chris Gillespie. Chris was big and loosely built, a little overweight, but hard under the padding. He was a cop with an education and better off than most for looks: curly hair, straight nose, white teeth. He liked blue suits, loud blue ties, and white shirts. Sam had the seniority—two years—and half Chris's education, but in four years of working together they'd never had a quarrel. Sam wrinkled his nose.

"You smell," he said.

"New shaving lotion. Like it?"

"Lovely," Sam said. "Just lovely."

Chris grinned. "Chief wants to see you."

"Poole?"

"What else?" Chris said. He took Sam's arm. Going down the hall, he said, "How's Lila?"

"Not happy," Sam said. "Baxter called me at two this morning. About Poole. Lila got in on it and hit the roof. You know how she's always after me to quit the cops and get in a safe line of work. Now, with a killer loose, blaming me for killing his wife, wanting my blood, she's taking it hard."

"It won't get better," Chris said.

"What d'you mean?"

"I'll let the chief tell you," Chris said.

The chief of detectives, Bob Brennan, was busy. He had one phone propped on his shoulder, another was ringing. A tape recorder occupied one corner of his desk, the rest was covered with reports.

Jim Snow, lieutenant, state patrol, was waiting with something half said. A pair of sharp young men—F.B.I., likely—were watching the chief; waiting, too. Sam and Chris Gillespie went to stand by a window.

Sam said, "How'd Poole make the honor farm?"

"A model prisoner," Chris said.

Poole had done three years inside the walls. Cheery, hard-working, eager to please from the first day. The guards had liked him, the brain doctor had liked him, the warden had liked him. Poole was a first offender, determined to pay his debt to society and make a new life. He'd deserved a break; they'd given it to him.

"A bill of goods," Sam said.

"They know it now," Chris said. "Poole was just building for the break. Worked on it a long time and brought it off as smooth as a—"

"Sam."

It was Bob Brennan, chief of detectives. Sam went over to the desk and Brennan introduced him. "Jim Snow, Fisk and Cassidy, F.B.I.," he said.

"This is Sam Wagner, the arresting officer." Now he looked steadily at Sam. "Turns out we've got a psycho on our hands."

"Poole's a psycho?"

"Looks that way."

Bob Brennan was a cop. He'd been one for thirty-five years and he wore the stamp. A big man, strong and beefy. He had slate-gray eyes, a rough-hewn face, and short, stiff gray hair. And he was shrewd. When he gave an opinion, men listened.

"What's the pitch?" Sam asked.

"He was a short-timer," Brennan said. "He has only a few years to do, and that on the honor farm. But he broke out the hard way, killing a guard. All to get even with you."

Sam said, "If I had a dollar for every thief who's promised me a hole in the head, I'd be a rich man."

"You and me and a million others," Brennan said. "But this one's different. It's what makes him a psycho. He doesn't want to put a hole in your head. He wants to kill your wife."

"My wife!"

"That's right," Brennan said. "He blames you for killing his wife, he wants an eye for an eye. I expect he'd settle for you, if he can't get your wife, but she's his target."

He flicked the switch of the tape recorder. While the tubes warmed, he said, "The warden of the state prison sent us this tape. After the break he put Poole's old cell mate on the carpet, thinking he might get something we could use." He adjusted the tape reels. "Listen."

"...the truth, s'help me. He kept saying he was dead. He kept saying he died the day that—that Sam Wagner killed his wife. Only one idea in Poole's head, just one. If I heard him say it once, I heard him say it a thousand times. Why should Wagner's wife be alive after Wagner killed Poole's wife? Was his wife any better? A lot of that—hour after hour. He said he'd bust out some day and kill the cop's wife. After that, he don't care what happens to him."

Brennan switched the recorder off. "Well?"

"I don't know," Sam said. "It's hard to believe."

"He murdered a guard to get off an honor farm," Brennan said. "If I can believe that, I can believe this."

Sam Wagner looked at the faces of the other men in the room. They believed it.

Brennan spoke again. "We ran the whole tape before you got here," he said. "An hour of it. This guy and a couple of

others. They all say the same thing. Want to hear it?"

Sam said, "Some other time."

He rubbed the back of his neck. This was something. Something a long way from the story he'd given Lila. He was wondering what Lila would say about it when one of the desk phones rang.

Brennan answered it. "Brennan speaking." He listened for several minutes. The men waiting learned nothing from his heavy face. "Thanks," he said. "Keep me informed." He pushed the phone aside and looked at those around the desk.

"Now he's got a gun," he said.

The skylight of a hardware store had been forced in the early hours of the morning, four thirty or five. A .357 Magnum revolver and a box of shells were missing. The local police had checked for prints. It had taken them this long to identify them as Leon Poole's. So Poole was armed.

"The store's in Tilden," Brennan said. Lieutenant Snow's breath hissed through stiff lips. Sam knew why. Tilden was only thirty miles away. The main roadblocks, the search, had been closer to the prison. Poole had somehow got past them. He'd come halfway.

"Don't ask me how," Brennan said. "Nobody knows." He looked at Lieutenant Snow, of the state patrol. "Keep your shirt on," he said. "Your lads are doing a good job. And they've doubled everything now, this side of Tilden. Poole's still got half the way to go. The tough half."

Snow said, "They'll get him."

"Sure they will," Brennan said.

"Three-five-seven Magnum," Sam said. "A nice gun."

"Very nice," Brennan said. "Do for elephants." He looked at Sam. "We've got a crew in the railroad yards, checking the incoming trains. Why don't you and Chris hop out there and give them a hand?" The telephone was ringing again. "And keep in touch," Brennan said.

The radio called Sam and Chris back to headquarters within the hour. Now the third-floor hall was crowded—reporters, photographers, uniformed city police, plainclothes and strangers. Brennan's office was crowded.

Sam saw a captain of the state patrol, the chief of city traffic, the vice squad second in command. Brennan's office had become a headquarters, that was obvious.

Sam felt a tightening inside himself as he approached Brennan's desk.

"Bad news, Sam," Brennan said.

"Yes, Chief?"

"Poole's in town somewhere."

A farmer's dog had found a man slugged, stripped to his shorts, tied and gagged and dumped in a cornfield north of Tilden. The dog's barking had brought the farmer. Pure luck the man had been found at all—side road, open country.

"Victim's name is Asa Smith," Brennan said. "Lives in Tilden, works here in town. Got his car out of his garage this morning, drove a block to a stop street. Poole opened the door and got in with him. Made him drive toward Prosser. Slugged him, stripped him, took the car."

"Rough," Sam said.

"It gets rougher," Brennan said. "Smith wouldn't do for Poole's twin, but he'd pass for his brother. Weight, height, hair, eyes—all about the same. Y'see? Poole matches Smith's driver's license and fits his clothes. The name on the driver's license matches the car registration. That's all Poole needed to get past the blockades."

The captain of the state patrol said, "We can't arrest

everybody we stop. If they can identify themselves, we have to let them through."

Brennan gave him a level stare. "Nobody blames you, Captain. I'd've let him through myself." He looked at Sam. "Smith gave us the license number of his car. Traffic found it parked on Jefferson Street twenty minutes ago. A good piece of work. Fast. But the bird had flown."

Sam said, "Smith had money in his wallet, I suppose?"

"Twenty-five or thirty bucks."

"All Poole will need," Sam said, "if this is as far as he wants to go."

"This is it." Brennan's eyes were steady. "He could have gone in a half dozen directions, all easier than the one he picked. But he came here, straight here. He wants a shot at your wife, Sam. You've got to believe that."

"What about her?" Sam asked.

"She's safe. I've loaded the neighborhood. And the house. He couldn't get to her with a tank."

"How's she taking it?"

"Not good. Worried stiff about you."

"Me?" Sam said. "You didn't tell her?"

"Not yet," Brennan said. "She thinks the police are in

the house in case Poole shows up, looking for you. We're letting it ride like that. Anything else is up to you."

Sam bit his lips. "My job, I guess."

"You know what she can take," Brennan agreed. "The problem now is to grab Poole. Any suggestions?"

Sam looked at the map of the city that hung on the wall. It was a big city. Poole could be anywhere. Downtown, in the residential districts, or in one of the outlying communities. A two-bit bus ride would reach them all.

"He wouldn't be in a hotel," Sam said. "Or a rooming house, or a boarding house, or a transient apartment. Too easy to find."

"We're looking," Brennan said.

"A first offender, he hasn't a lot of connections. He couldn't buy a hideout. Not enough money. And he's too hot."

"Right again."

"A friend wouldn't take him in."

"I doubt it, but we're checking."

Sam said, "He couldn't walk the streets or hide in the brush. Somebody'd spot him. He'd know he'd have to get in under a roof somewhere."

"Whose roof?"

"Anybody's," Sam said.

He looked at the map again. There were thousands of homes in the residential areas, more thousands close by. Families in each one. Kids, grownups.

A man with a gun could walk into any home. He could take this one or that one of the family as a hostage. The others would dance to his tune. Everyone would know he had killed a guard. They would know they'd die as the guard had died unless they walked a very careful line. And if one of them was foolishly brave? If Poole became nervous, impatient, frightened?

Sam said, "It's a tough proposition."

"Very tough," Brennan said. "And we haven't got forever. He'll kill again if we don't get him soon. I've put it on the radio and in the papers—everybody check their neighbor. If they see anything unusual or different, they're to call us on the quiet. It's something, but not much."

"Not enough," Sam said.

Brennan looked at him steadily. And Sam was conscious, then, of the weight of every other eye in the room. They were all looking at him quietly, waiting. Waiting for what? And then Sam knew why he'd been called in, why Brennan had asked him for a suggestion.

"Poole doesn't know, does he?" Sam said. "I mean, that we know he's after Lila?"

"How could he?" There was a gleam in Brennan's eyes. "He didn't hear the tape. He doesn't know his cell mates told the warden."

"He'll scout my place," Sam said. "If he finds the neighborhood loaded with cops, he'll go back under cover and stay as long as he has to. A week, two weeks, three weeks."

Brennan nodded.

"But, if it looks normal around there—no cops, me going to work, coming home—he might make his try." He saw the light growing in Brennan's eyes. "He'll know I'm there, at least. He'll know he can settle for me, if he can't find Lila."

"And he'll buy it," Brennan said.

Sam saw Brennan's eyes move to the other men in the room. Besides the light in his eyes, now there was a faint smile on his heavy face. The smile said, "You see?" Bob Brennan's eyes came back to Sam.

"We talked it over before you came in, Sam," he said. "We had the same idea. It was your pick, of course. I knew you'd make it, of course. I knew you'd make it. And we've got a couple of things to add. Time's short. We want him to

move now—this afternoon, tonight. And I think we can persuade him to do it.”

“How?”

“A diversion,” Brennan said. “We’ll get out a bulletin—radio, newspapers, TV—saying we have him cornered in the Kretlow Hills. Identification positive. That’s rough country out there, take a couple of days to cover it all. And we’ll cover it—planes, roadblocks, bloodhounds, the works. Pictures, more bulletins all the time. Poole will call it a fine piece of luck. He’ll grab the chance.”

“Sounds good,” Sam said.

“Who do you want to run the show at your place?” Brennan asked. “You can’t do it. You’re the bait.”

“Chris suits me.”

“Fine. And your wife?”

“I’ll move her out,” Sam said. “If she’s not at our phone-book address, she’s on the moon as far as he’s concerned. He won’t know where to look.”

“Take her to my place,” Chris said. “I’ll call the wife and tell her you’re on the way.”

“Can do,” Sam said.

Leon Poole walked east in the rain on Holly Road. The city was a thirty-minute bus ride behind him. This was suburban country: mailboxes standing beside black pavement,

small homes, young orchards shivering in the November wind.

There was little traffic at ten o’clock in the morning. He was certain that none in the passing cars would note or remember him.

His hat was too small. It rode oddly high on his head. He wore a blue suit, a transparent slicker, and carried a brown brief case. He was cold and hungry and very tired. Never strong, the past hours, the strain, the miles he’d traveled had left his knees shaking with weakness.

He forced himself to walk firmly, head erect—an insurance salesman making a morning call or a real-estate agent out to inspect property. He read the names stenciled on the mailboxes as he went along.

The house he sought stood well away from the road, a neat, shingled structure, square and small. The shades were drawn and no smoke came from the chimney. A small sedan was parked on the gravel drive.

He went past the car to the back porch. The blinds here were up. He could see a stove, a table, and the white bulk of a refrigerator. He set the brief case beside the door and lifted the skirt of the slicker to put his hand on the gun in his coat pocket.

The door was not locked. Leon Poole opened it slowly and carefully and walked into the quiet room.

He went through the house, moving on tiptoe. A living room, dining room. Gray light seeped through the drawn blinds. An inner hall gave on the bedroom and bath.

Poole opened the bedroom door carefully and slowly. A muscle quivered in his cheek. He found the light switch and flicked it up with nervous haste. He stayed in the doorway, a plump, frightened man, wrapped in a dripping slicker.

Across the room a woman sat up in bed, blinking, surprise in her face. Beside her, a man slept with his cheek pillowed on his hands.

"Please don't scream," Poole said.

"Who are you?" The woman's voice was thin. She stared at him, the covers clutched at her breast. "What do you want?"

"Will you wake your husband?" Poole said.

The man was awake, pushing himself up. He was not frightened. A faint grin, almost derisive, turned the corners of his wide mouth.

"I'll be damned," he said. "Poole. Leon Poole."

"Yes," Poole said. "Get up. Get dressed."

The name of the man in bed was Otto Flanders. He'd been an Army first sergeant, and now, sitting up, naked to the waist, he still had the look of one. Hard and confident. Poole had been a corporal in his company—Signal Corps, Calcutta—and Otto Flanders could think of him as nothing else. He sat on the bed, arms around his knees, and grinned at Corporal Poole.

"Yes, sir," he said, "I will be damned. When I heard you helped yourself to the bank's cash and got thrown in the can, I said to myself, 'It can't be. Not Corporal Poole. Not Fat Boy.'"

Leon Poole took the heavy revolver from his pocket. He pointed it at Otto Flanders' bare chest.

"Get up," he said.

Flanders' face hardened. "That's a lot of ordnance."

"I know how to use it," Poole said. "You taught me, remember."

Flanders stared at him. "How come you're loose?"

His wife said, "Otto, maybe you'd better—"

"Relax." Flanders grinned at Poole. "Well?"

"Don't you read a paper or listen to the radio?"

"Not on my day off. I'm sleepin' in, or was." He put brown hands on his knees.

"You tryin' to say you broke out?"

"I escaped," Poole said. "Late yesterday. I killed a guard. The police everywhere are looking for me."

"You killed a guard?"

"Yes," Poole said. "Now will you get up?"

"Oh, Otto—" the woman whispered.

Otto Flanders' eyes were steady on Poole's face. "Yeah," he said. "I'll get up. Take it easy." To his wife, he said, "You, too. Take it easy. I'll handle this."

Poole said, "Be careful."

"Always careful. Careful Otto, that's me."

He got up without haste, without nervousness or fear—with care. His eyes never left the gray face of Leon Poole. He found shorts and jeans and put them on. He put his fists on his hips—six feet of lean brown man, hard and capable.

"Now what d'we do?"

"We'll go out in the kitchen," Poole said. "Your wife will get up and get me something to eat. I'll kill one of you if the other tries anything. Don't scream, don't try to telephone, don't try to get away."

Flanders said, "Do what he says, hon."

Poole backed through the door into the living room.

Flanders followed him. He turned his back on the gun and went into the kitchen. He made preparations for coffee—kettle on the stove, coffee in the drip pot. He didn't look at Poole, but he was very much aware of him.

Poole had shed the slicker and hat. He was standing where he could look into the small kitchen, a soft-looking man, gray with fatigue, who held a heavy revolver in his pudgy hand. Flanders' wife came in, a rough bathrobe thrown over her nightdress.

"Easy does it," Otto Flanders said.

His wife, Grace Flanders, was a big woman in her middle thirties. Her face was the color of sand now, and her eyes held fear that was almost anguish. She clattered a frying pan on the range.

"You're scaring the hell outa my wife," Flanders said.

Poole said, "That can't be helped."

"What'd you come here for?"

"No one knows. I know you," Poole said. "In Calcutta you talked a lot about this place. It's near the city, you have no close neighbors." The plump shoulders moved in a tired shrug. "I didn't have a lot of choice," he said, "or a lot of time."

"So you picked me." Flanders came out of the kitchen to stand with his bare back against the door frame. "You're nuts," he said. "Y'can't get away with this. All the cops in the country are lookin' for you—they'll find you."

"I know that," Poole said. "I expect it. But I'll have time to kill the woman I want to kill before they find me."

"Gimme that again?"

"The man who sent me to prison killed a woman I loved more than anything in the world. More than life, much more." Poole's voice was faint, almost listless, but still matter-of-fact. "It was murder. I think he should suffer the way I suffered. Then they can do what they want with me."

Flanders stared at him. A line of white came to rim his tight lips.

Slowly he said, "I guess you mean that."

"I must certainly do."

Flanders waited a moment.

"You'll never make it."

"I think I will," Poole said.

"Unh-uh," Flanders said.

"And I'll tell you why. You're tired. I can see yuh shakin'. You got to rest sometime, you got to sleep, don't you? How're you goin' to do it? Tie me up? Tie my wife up? You can do that—maybe. But I've handled some real tough characters in

my time. You'll make a mistake. When you do, I'll take you. And I won't leave enough of you to send home for cat food."

"You're strong," Poole said. "I know that."

"Want a piece of advice?" Flanders held out a big hand, palm up. "Give me that gun now and I'll treat you gentle."

"No," Poole said.

Flanders' voice took a rough edge. "Think I can't take you, gun or no gun? Think you aren't goin' to make a mistake, sooner or later? Turn your head a minute, take your eyes offa me one second—that's all I need. I'm not kiddin'!"

"I know you're not," Poole said. His round face seemed to sag even more; his large brown eyes held something close to tears. "You're quick," he said. "I'm tired and not very sharp. It wouldn't be hard. You could throw something—"

"Okay," Flanders said. "How about it?"

Poole shot Flanders through the chest. The gun was big—one shot was all that was needed. The sound of it crashed enormously in the room. Poole saw Flanders punched backward against the door frame, saw him turn slowly and fall.

Beyond the door, in the kitchen, Grace Flanders stood motionless before the range,

then closed her eyes and crumpled to the floor. She hadn't screamed. Poole went to a chair and sat down. He stared at Otto Flanders and his wife. "I'm not sorry," he said. "I had to do it."

Sam Wagner drove through the rain-swept streets with care. He watched the traffic behind him, the oncoming traffic and the traffic beside him, with particular attention to cars driven by men alone. Now and then he glanced at Lila.

She was sitting beside him, hands clasped in her lap, watching the beating windshield wipers. She was grimly silent, her lips set and her chin firm. Her silence was a protest. A uniformed officer had let Sam through his own front door. He'd found two plainclothes men in the living room with Lila. There'd been squad cars in the street as they'd driven away. Her silence was a protest against all this, and with Lila silence was far more grim than any words.

"No questions?" he asked.

"One," she said. "Where are we going?"

"Gillespie's," Sam said. "You're going to stay with Mary until we get our hands on Poole."

He hadn't told Lila it was her life that Poole wanted. And

now, thinking about it again, he decided that this was still not the time. She was keyed, he knew, to the breaking point. Nothing could be gained by frightening her more. After the thing was done, after Poole was dead or behind bars, would be time enough.

She said, "This is not the way to Gillespie's."

"A roundabout way," he said.

"Why roundabout?"

Sam set his narrow jaw. "That's obvious, isn't it? The guy's loose somewhere in town. He might have picked up another car. He might have been waiting and spotted me when I drove away. Not likely, but possible. We're not taking any chances, Lila."

She turned on the seat to watch the traffic behind them. After Sam had made two more turns, she said, "Sam, there is a car following us."

"Black sedan?"

"Yes."

"There's a maroon sedan ahead of us, too," Sam said. "Cops in both of them. They're clearing us, Lila."

Lila turned to stare through the windshield again. Silent again, grim again. Sam knew there was an explosion on the way. She couldn't hold that much anger, that much resentment long without letting it go.

When the explosion came Sam knew it would be big. He wondered if their marriage, or any marriage, could be strong enough to stand against it.

Mary Gillespie met them at the door. She kissed Lila and took her coat. Her dark eyes questioned Sam. "Does she know?" Sam shook his head. Mary bit her lips. She didn't know whether it was right or not.

Sam said, "This is a lot of trouble."

"Idiot!" Mary said. "What good am I, if I can't help?"

Sam was looking at Lila. She'd gone into the living room, she was standing with her back to him. He looked at Mary Gillespie and shook his head again. Mary knew how Lila felt about police and police work. And she understood clearly what this business of Poole meant.

Sam said, "Lila, I'll keep in touch."

She turned. "Sam, why am I here?"

"I told you," Sam said. "A precaution. We're not taking any chances. And you're safe here. All Poole's got is our phone-book address. If you're not there, you're on the moon as far as he's concerned. He can't find you."

"Why should he want to?"

Sam lied a little. "He's a

psycho. I explained that. You never know what a psycho might do. If he can't find me, he might settle for you."

"And what are you going to do?"

"Going back to the house, Lila," Sam said. "We've got a trap rigged for him. An army of cops out of sight. If things look normal around there—"

"You're the bait for the trap?"

"In a sense, I suppose. I—"

"You are, Sam." Her face was white now. "Don't try to avoid the truth. You're using yourself as bait. That's very noble and brave. But it seems to me you have other responsibilities."

"What would you have me do?"

"If he can't find me here, he can't find you here. Or anywhere we care to go. You and I can drive down to the beach, can't we? And stay at a motel until this is over?"

"No, we can't."

"Why not?"

"I'll tell you why."

And he told her. Not gently. There was anger in him, too. His voice was slow, implacable, and cold.

Every cop hunting Poole, he said, was laying his life on the line. He was not going to run out on them. More than that, he said, his life and the lives of

was alone in the room. He got out of his chair and turned off the radio. He had slept most of the day, and he looked well and felt well.

He stood for a moment, lips pursed. The body of Otto Flanders lay where it had fallen, blanket-covered. Leon Poole didn't see it. He listened to the rain slatting against the windows. A night like this would be a good night, he thought. Everyone hurrying through the storm, heads down, collars up.

He thought about the radio announcement. It could be a trick, but it could be the truth, too. The police might make a mistake like that. If they had made a mistake, it would be the best thing in the world for him. "I'm tempted," he said.

But still he had to think it through carefully. He thought the odds against him were very high. But hadn't they always been? Would they ever be better than they were now? No. Every hour, every day increased the odds against him.

"Well, then," he said, "now is the time."

He went past the body. The bedroom door was open. He found the light switch. Grace Flanders was lying on the bed beneath a comforter. There was adhesive tape across her mouth. More tape bound her wrists and ankles.

Shock had made her face vacantly ugly; her eyes were dull and puffed with weeping. Leon Poole did not look at her. He went around the bed to open the closet door.

He needed a dress, something plain and dark. Fit was no problem; Grace Flanders was a big woman, her hands and feet were large. He needed a coat with a full collar—fur, if the woman owned one. He needed shoes, a hat and an umbrella.

He pawed through the dresses on the closet rack. The blue wool would do nicely.

Sam Wagner was at home. The blinds were up, the living room was well lighted. Sam sat beneath a reading lamp, a magazine in his lap. His eyes went to the clock. Eight fifteen. Outside, the storm still whipped the trees and threw rain in bursts against the windows. It had been a long afternoon and a long evening.

The compact two-way short-wave radio on the floor beside Sam's chair spoke softly. A man on foot had entered the area. He was watched, checked from one post to another until he entered a house a block away, a family man home from work.

A sedan, driven by a woman, turned onto Montgomery from a main east-west artery, moving slowly. It was tracked past

the other police were not the only ones at stake.

He told her where they thought Poole was hiding—in someone's home, holding them hostage—and that Poole would certainly kill again, unless they caught him soon.

"I'm a member of the human race," he said. "It seems to me I owe my fellow members something. And I'm not taking any big risk. I'll be covered. He won't get through."

"He won't get through!" Lila said. "He came from Winston here, didn't he? An escaped convict, on foot, without a friend—he got through half the police in the state, didn't he? You said he couldn't, but he did! He's smarter than you think. He knows all your tricks. He'll be watching for them. And you try to tell me there's no risk." Her voice turned hoarse. "Go on! Tell me again! Lie to me!"

"I won't lie to you," Sam said. "There is risk."

She covered her face with her hands. She stood that way for a long moment, and when she took her hands away, Sam knew the final time had come. Her face was taut and white.

"I can't go on," she said. "I'd go stark raving mad if I tried to. You think your duty lies with your work. I think it

lies with me—us. I'm not going to argue, I'm not going to fight. I love you, Sam. Perhaps too much. But I can't go on wondering if the next footstep I hear will be a man come to tell me you've been killed. It will be easier to forget you than to live a nightmare." Her hands were locked behind her. "Either we drive to the beach now, or we're through."

Quietly Sam asked, "Is that final, Lila?"

Mary said, "Sam! Lila! For the love of heaven—"

Lila said, "That's final, Sam."

"We've had it, then." Sam said. "Good luck, girl."

A radio spoke quietly in the living room of the house on Holly Road. In a statement made at five p.m., the radio said, Lieutenant Snow, of the state patrol, had reaffirmed that escaped convict-murderer Leon Poole was within the police cordon surrounding the Kretlow Hills.

Bad weather and difficult terrain had slowed the search. It would continue, however, throughout the night. Every available man and means was being used. Capture was expected at any hour.

Leon Poole said, "True or false?"

No one answered him, for he

Sam's house almost to Van Brocklin, another main artery, where it turned again, out of the area.

A pair of high-school kids ran past Sam's house, heads down in the rain. Another car, a woman driver, another car, a man driver—checked in, checked out.

It had been like that all afternoon and evening. Every approach was covered. Any man who even came close to the description of Leon Poole was followed by a dozen guns.

"A woman," the radio said. "Fat, middle-aged, carrying an umbrella on Thirty-fifth."

"Okay," Chris Gillespie said. "Don't scare her."

He was in the house directly across the street from Wagner's. He'd commandeered an upstairs bedroom. The searchlight was there, ready for use. Two riflemen stood behind darkened windows.

Gillespie was the center of the radio net; every movement in the neighborhood was plotted and charted in the room where he sat. Brennan, at headquarters, was the center of a net that covered the city.

"Black coupe on Montgomery," the radio said crisply. "Looks like a high-school kid."

The black coupe was tracked and cleared.

Sam wondered if it would comfort the woman on Thirty-fifth to know that never in her life would she be safer on a dark street than she was right now. She really had protection.

The radio again, Gillespie's voice. "Sam, come in."

Sam opened his microphone. "Sam speaking, Chris."

"We've lost Lila," Chris said.

"What d'you mean, lost her?"

"She's not at my house. She walked out."

"Why?" Sam said. "When?"

"That wife of mine," Chris said. "She's good people, all heart, but she can't keep her nose out of things. She's Mrs. Fixit, y'know. She's got to help. She couldn't stand Lila bein' mad at you. I'm goin' to paddle her for this, I promise you that. Sam, she told Lila the score, and I'm afraid she was rough about it. She told Lila you were sitting in for her, playing pigeon in Lila's place."

"How long ago did Lila leave?"

"Twenty or thirty minutes ago," Chris said. "Hard to say exactly. Mary thought she was napping. She looked in the bedroom to check and Lila was gone. Sorry, Sam." The radio was silent for a moment, then, "Any idea where she'd go? Her sister's maybe? Some other relative?"

Sam thought of Lila alone in Gillespie's bedroom. Knowing now that she was Poole's target, remembering the words she'd hurled at him. Sam found his hands were suddenly shaking. His voice was oddly thick.

"She's coming home, Chris," he said.

"Home?" Chris said. "What makes you think so?"

"She's my wife, Chris. She'd want to be here."

"Oh." Again Chris was silent for a moment. "I think you're right," he said. "Lila would, with the chips down."

Sam said, "Keep an eye out for her."

"Check," Chris said. "Will do."

Lila Wagner was tired. She was sitting behind the driver, on the first seat of the Van Brocklin Street bus, her hands clenched in her lap. She was cold, wet, and she couldn't remember another time when her head had ached so blindingly.

She rubbed mist from the window and peered out into the rain-lashed night. Oak Street. Harrison next. Then the long climb up to Montgomery and she was home. Almost.

She didn't want to think of the walk from the bus stop to the house—four blocks, and most of it in the thick dark

beneath huge and ancient trees. She thought, instead, of Mary Gillespie, a white-faced, big-eyed Mary. She heard again Mary's hurt and shaking voice.

"Hate me, if you will," she'd said, "but I can't wait any longer. You're being a coward, Lila. A thoughtless, selfish coward." Blazing anger hadn't stopped her. "Sam puts his work before you, does he? Risks his life for strangers? Doesn't care what happens to you? Well, here's the truth. He'll trade his life for yours any time. He's offering to do it now. It isn't Sam that Poole wants to kill. It's you!"

There'd been more. And when Mary had left her, closing the bedroom door, there'd been a half hour in the darkness. A long look at Lila Wagner. Yes, she was a coward—that was her only clear decision. But somehow out of it had come the knowledge that she had to go home. Sam was taking her place, and that was wrong. His life was more important than her own. She couldn't reason why. She knew it because her heart had told her so.

"Harrison," the bus driver said.

A boulevard stop. The bus halted and a man and woman got aboard. Lila Wagner's heart lurched. The man was short and fat, wrapped in a sodden trench

coat. He dropped his fare in the box and turned.

The man was not Poole; he was sixty or sixty-five. He wore a bristling gray mustache, a gray tuft of beard. But Lila, finding she'd held her breath, knew she'd been very much afraid.

"Montgomery next," the driver said.

The bus crawled up the hill, buffeted by wind and rain. Lila watched the landmarks pass: the haloed neon of David Drug, the Thrifty-Mart and the theater. Three blocks to go.

Now waves of fear began to flow through her. The man with the beard had started them. Her mind filled with images of Poole—dark, liquid eyes, sodden face. He had stabbed a man in the throat, he was waiting somewhere for her.

She looked out the window. Two blocks to go.

One block.

Now she found she didn't want to ring the bell. She couldn't face that dark and dripping tunnel beneath the trees. Not yet.

Her hand went up and pulled the cord.

The bus swung over to the curb, the door sighed open. *I can't get off. Sam, I can't, I can't.* She was on her feet, going past the driver and down the steps. In a moment, the bus was gone.

The service station and garage here were dark. The corner arc light bounced on the wind and long shadows raced across the pavement, clawing at her legs.

She looked down Montgomery Street toward home. Hedges and dripping trees and the wet shining of light on a parked car. Four blocks—four blocks was such an enormous distance. All that darkness, all those shadows, all those trees. A man, a dozen men, could be hidden along here.

She couldn't do it. No matter what the cost, she hadn't the strength or the courage. And yet she did do it. She crossed the paved service-station lot and went into the dark beneath the trees.

Don't think, she told herself. *Just walk—fast.*

Water spilled down the street to roar into the storm drains. At the intersection she had to wade in water ankle-deep. Then she was under the trees that roofed the walk again.

"Only three blocks to go," she whispered. "Just three."

She saw the lumpy figure then. A woman standing against a hedge. A fat, middle-aged woman holding an umbrella. Not moving, not doing anything, just standing there.

Lila glanced at her. There was darkness and shadow, but

light enough to see a wet and pallid face above a coat collar of thin, wet fur. The woman wore a hat, shapeless, mashed, and somehow—wrong!

A silent shriek of warning rang in Lila's mind. No woman would ever wear a hat like that. She looked again and saw eyes that were dark, liquid, and staring. She knew those eyes.

Leon Poole, she told herself.

She heard his step on the walk behind her. She didn't look back. She couldn't look back. She walked steadily down the hill, shocked and numbed with terror.

His footfalls exactly matched her own. He didn't gain, he didn't lag. The flesh of her back crawled with the waiting—waiting for the impact of a bullet or a sudden overpowering rush.

Neither came. A half block and still nothing. Why? He had seen her face. He was following her, he must know who she was.

Then a cold clarity came to her mind. He wasn't sure. He hadn't seen her since the courtroom more than three years ago. She had changed, she'd lost weight, her face was thinner, her clothes were different.

He wasn't sure enough to cut her down. He was waiting for her to reach home. He knew the

address. The moment she turned up the walk—

But she didn't have to turn; she realized that suddenly. She could go past the house. The moment she did, she would be any woman in the world but Lila Wagner.

Poole would let her go. He would turn to the house, to the lighted windows. The police were waiting for a man. Poole, in a woman's clothes, would have time enough to reach a window, to find Sam, to lift his gun and shoot.

"Oh, God," Lila whispered.

Again she measured her strength, her resolve, the cost. She'd found strength enough to leave Mary Gillespie, to ride the bus, to leave the bus. She'd had enough to come this far.

But this was the end. She couldn't turn up the walk toward the house. It was hopelessly beyond her.

"Oh, Sam," she whispered. "I can't do it!"

The short-wave radio beside Sam Wagner's chair had been jammed with voices the past few minutes. The watch in the dark service station at Van Brocklin and Montgomery had seen a woman get off the bus. The woman might be Lila Wagner. The man in the service station did not know her; he could not be sure.

"Tall?" Sam said. "Gray coat, gray fur hat?"

"Check," the radio said.

"A bus, for the luvva Mike!" This was Chris Gillespie's voice. "Why not a cab right to her door?"

"She's a frugal woman," Sam said. "She hates cabs. A cab wouldn't enter her mind."

"Let's pick her up," Chris said.

"This's Five," a new voice said.

"There're two women now. The other's the one we had on Thirty-fifth. The fat job with the umbrella. She's behind Mrs. Wagner."

"Watch her!" Sam said. And then a new thought flashed in his mind. "Chris! Is the fat one a woman?"

Chris said, "Come in, anybody. Is that fat one a woman? Make damn sure. Poole's fat, and he could wear a fat woman's clothes. Sufferin' Joe, come in, somebody! Come in!"

Several voices spoke at once. Then a new voice came in clearly. "Had a look at her under the light at Thirty-fourth. I wouldn't bet she's a woman. Under the umbrella it's hard to tell. But the way she walks."

Chris said, "Let's move in!"

"Stand fast!" Sam's voice was harsh. "If that's Poole, why's he waiting? He's not sure it's Lila. He's waiting to see if

she comes here. If we move in, he'd know we've got him boxed and start shooting. Lila first."

"Maybe we can put a car between them at Thirty-third."

"Too late," a voice said. "They've crossed."

Another voice said, "I can stop him with a rifle. He won't do any shooting after a slug hits him."

"And if the fat one is a woman?" Sam asked.

Chris said, "You call it, Sam. We'll do it."

Leon Poole held the umbrella in his left hand. His right hand was in the pocket of Mrs. Flanders' coat, holding tight to the butt of the heavy revolver. He was a dozen paces behind the tall slender woman, walking carefully, trying to remember a woman's stride was short and clipped. If he broke stride, the sound would frighten her. He wanted her to go on, unworried.

Granted things could break for him, as well as against him. But too much good luck was suspicious. The wild goose chase in the Kretlow Hills was all a man could really hope for. Then, after all the struggle and fight and risk, to have Lila Wagner pass within arm's reach, alone, on a dark and deserted street—that was beyond all bounds of reason.

Her description fitted, yes. He'd often thought the face he'd seen in the courtroom could never change so much that he wouldn't recognize it anywhere, any time, at a glance. And he'd been certain in the brief moment.

Then reason had asserted itself. It was more luck than he could hope for. And if he killed the wrong woman here, so close to Wagner's, the police would know what he intended and guard her well, and his last hope of justice would vanish.

"I can wait," he said, "a little longer."

Lila Wagner would go into the Wagner house. Another woman would continue on. As simple as that. When she turned, if she turned, he would have time—perhaps as she climbed the front steps, perhaps as she opened the door. If she didn't turn, then he could try the windows.

The house had been well lighted when he'd driven by a little while ago. There was someone home. Surely he would be able to find Lila Wagner through one of the windows.

If not the woman, then Sam Wagner. He would have to take what he could get now; he was sure he would never get this close again.

He carefully matched his

stride with that of the woman ahead, step for step. He felt like a man walking a very high wire, danger on every hand, the goal almost within his reach. And he was confident. He would reach the goal. The Wagner walk was only a few steps away.

The woman ahead faltered. A catch in her stride, a half stumble. Poole's hand closed tightly on the gun.

Two more strides and the woman faltered again. Her head was bent, one hand seemed to be at her face. The Wagner walk was only a step or two ahead of her. She straightened to walk firmly, determinedly. She was going past the Wagner house; Poole knew that suddenly and certainly. He cursed softly. This was not the woman.

A stride beyond the walk, Lila turned. She'd met a barrier she couldn't pass. A barrier within herself. She turned suddenly, glad that she had to turn, glad that she could turn and run, bent low and screaming, toward the front porch.

She heard the roar of a gun and fell.

Her sudden movement had surprised Poole. Sure she was going on, he'd relaxed for a moment. Then he'd drawn the gun and fired hurriedly at the bent, fast-moving figure. He missed.

He knew he'd missed.

He lifted the gun for another shot—a shot he never fired.

A wild man vaulted the hedge between Poole and the Wagner walk. A man in shirt sleeves who planted himself on wide-spread legs, facing Poole, gun in hand. Brilliant light burst on them.

Poole tried to shift his gun for a shot at the man in front of him. Again, too late. Sam Wagner fired first. At ten feet, in bright light, he did not miss.

Rifles boomed across the street, revolvers barked, and a submachine gun tore the night.

Leon Poole was dead before his body struck the wall.

The night passed. A long night for Lila. A confused night. A night in which her husband proved himself a hard-fisted, swearing, unreasonable tyrant. She remembered him lunging up the front lawn, scooping her up in his arms, and slamming into the house with her. She remembered him bellowing, "A doctor! Get a doctor fast!"

He'd thrown her on the bed so hard she bounced; he'd petted her until she was black and blue. Had she cried? Of course, she'd cried. She'd been half out of her mind, crying about a dozen things.

"Sam, for the love of Pete!"

Chris Gillespie's voice. "Will you stop pounding on her? She'll be all right. Do something useful—bar the door. There's a howling mob out there."

Police, reporters, photographers, the curious—hundreds, by the sound of them. She'd heard Sam's voice roaring above the clamor, "No! No pictures, no stories! Tomorrow, or next week, or never! But not now!"

The doctor, then. "No harm done, Mr. Wagner. Your child will be along on schedule. Your wife's a strong woman."

And Sam: "You're telling me?" A wonderful thing to sleep on, a wonderful thing to wake up to. And now, in the quiet of her bedroom in the morning, something wonderfully warm to hold in her heart.

She'd been afraid, terribly afraid. But still she'd been the wife Sam needed and wanted and had to have. And she was sure, now, that she could always be that kind of wife.

Worth it? A hundred times worth it. He was out in the kitchen, a whistling happy man. In a moment he came into the bedroom with a breakfast tray. When he looked at her, his pale blue eyes were shining.

"What d'you say, sweet? Hungry?"

"Like a horse," she said. "Both of us."

Orson Welles

Diplomatic Crisis; or, Fifi and the Chilean Truffle

KING OF THE AISLED FRONTIER

Orson Welles, born May 16, 1915... child prodigy, boy wonder, man marvel...

Child prodigy: before his teens Orson Welles appeared in and directed Shakespearean plays...

Boy wonder: at sixteen he appeared with the Abbey Players in London; at seventeen he toured in Katherine Cornell's company; at twenty he produced a Negro version of *MACBETH* on Broadway; at twenty-two he was director of the Federal Theatre project in New York; at twenty-three his CBS radio broadcast on October 30, 1938 of H. G. Wells's *THE WAR OF THE WORLDS*, starring the boy wonder himself, was projected so realistically and so convincingly that thousands of listeners thought a Martian invasion was actually taking place...

When does a boy become a man?

With John Houseman, Mr. Welles founded the Mercury Theatre, and such remarkable productions as *JULIUS CAESAR* in modern dress became Broadway sensations; at twenty-six his "*Citizen Kane*"—daring, sensitive, off-beat—made motion picture history; at thirty-one he was the dynamic force in the unorthodox musical, "*Around the World*," based on the famous Jules Verne novel; at thirty-four he spent three months in Rome filming "*Othello*"; and then "*Romeo and Juliet*"—"The Barretts of Wimpole Street"—"*Heartbreak House*"—"Native Son"—"*King Lear*"—"Moby Dick"—the titles Mr. Welles has been associated with, as actor, producer, director, sound like magical incantations, or the Honor Roll of the theatre, movies, radio, and television...

And, between times, how often he has "threatened" to go away and write a novel (why doesn't someone make him do it?).

Is it any wonder that all his life, as child, boy, and man, Orson Welles has not only impressed the world but captivated it with his brilliance as a creative iconoclast and as a performer?

He has gone on record as being interested chiefly in experimentation. He admits he has a "good, healthy ego," and delights in hearing his work praised (who doesn't?); but his major preoccupation has always been in "opening up new fields or leaving the old ones better than they were" after Mr. Welles aimed his spear at them.

And now we offer you a short story by the Great Man (no iota of disrespect intended)—a charming and ironic little tale about Fifi and the Chilean truffle that almost started a world war. . . What prodigious exploits are still to come from Orson Welles's exploring, inquisitive mind and from that wondrous voice?

THERE WAS ONCE A truffle that almost started a world war. Not a "trifle"—truffle. *Tuber Melanosporum*—the black things they put into goose livers. Pigs dig for them, but they almost never get to eat them. Any pig you're likely to find rooting about under an oak tree in the French Province of Perigord is bound to be heavily chaperoned by a keeneyed farmer with a pocketful of corn. The pig gets the corn, and what the farmer gets for the truffle is a pretty penny (or "joli sou").

That Shakespeare among chefs, Brillat-Savarin, referred to the truffle as "the black diamond of the kitchen"—and

the little roots are priced accordingly.

In the autumn months optimistic porkers in Northern Italy turn up an outstandingly succulent "white" truffle—actually a lovely, clouded gray. These are grated into silky paper-thin flakes and heaped over the fluffy *risottos* of Milan. But luckily these superb rarities are seasonal, and travel poorly—and thereby hangs my tale.

It happened in Paris and the tragic hero was a Minister in the French Cabinet.

The villain was a truffle.

This truffle was neither black nor white.

"It pretends," said Henri

the Minister's chef, "to be gray. But in point of fact, it is the most abominable green."

The truffle was, moreover, enormous. It was the size of a cantaloupe and it came from Chile, where the father of the Minister's wife had once been *en poste*.

This lady's childhood memories of Chilean truffles were so glamorous that she had pulled strings, and the striking example now under her chef's suspicious eye had been flown all the way from Santiago to Paris in the diplomatic pouch.

His Excellency the Minister had at first mistaken it for some exotic meteorological specimen, while the First Under-Secretary, with a nice flair for melodrama, took the precaution of immersing the truffle in a tub of water under the impression that it was a bomb.

Madame, the Minister's wife, lost no time in setting everybody straight. As they well knew, an official dinner of the highest importance was to be given that very evening.

"It is July," she pointed out. "The white truffles of Italy are not to be found, and people eat black truffles every day."

This last, of course, was not strictly accurate, but her husband contented himself with hinting that perhaps his honored guests, being digni-

taries from Soviet Russia, would not, during their brief stay in Paris, have already become sated to the point of boredom with French truffles.

"The truffle of Chile," said Madame with finality, "is a pleasing novelty. Inform the chef to use it with the sole." And with this she leaves our story, for the dinner was a stag affair.

"It would not be wise," said the Minister with typical understatement, "to disregard my wife's wishes. And besides, the Russians will not know the difference."

But the chef, a man of vivid temperament, was not to be placated. "Think of the responsibility!" he cried, holding the mossy truffle at arm's length. "Sixteen high-ranking dignitaries of the Soviet Union! Suppose they die?"

"Now, now, Henri, don't make a drama of it."

"Drama?"—first placing the truffle gingerly on the floor, Henri started waving his arms—"Drama? Let me assure Your Excellency that to involve such a vegetable growth in a fish sauce, and to feed it to a group of men schooled in the most direct methods of political action—that is not to make drama, but to encourage tragedy!"

"He is thinking," said the

First Under-Secretary in a discreet undertone, "of reprisals."

"Well, now, Henri, don't forget the Ministry is behind you."

"Your Excellency forgets to what I owe my first loyalty."

"Naturally, your professional pride—"

"Not at all. I refer to my position as a member of the Communist Party."

It had slipped the Cabinet Minister's mind that his chef was a Communist. "That does make it awkward, doesn't it?"

"I am already suspected of deviationism," said Henri. "Imagine my fate if so much as one minor gastric upset—"

"Henri, my wife stands behind those truffles."

"She is a brave woman, Your Excellency."

"Now if one of you," said the Minister, "would care to act as a guinea pig—"

There followed an uneasy silence disturbed only by the asthmatic snufflings of Fifi, an aged Peke.

"It boils down to this," the Minister resumed, staring bleakly out of the window, "we have the choice of poisoning the entire Soviet delegation or defying the express wishes of my wife. Either contingency is unthinkable. Fifi! Come back with that!"

The Pekinese had seized upon the truffle, and was worrying it drearily across the parquet floor. The First Under-Secretary jumped forward as Fifi dug her teeth into the vegetable's greenish flesh; but suddenly the First Under-Secretary stopped—the dog was chewing, with evident relish, a generous hunk of the Chilean delicacy. And a terrible look had come into the Minister's eye.

"Long ago," he said, speaking in tones he generally reserved for funerals of the highest pomp, "this elderly and ailing beast should have been put quietly away. Should it survive until dinner we are safe to proceed with the menu as planned by my wife. But should Fifi perish—it will be in a good cause: the security of the Republic of France."

By dinner time everyone was breathing easier. Fifi was perhaps the only exception. Not that the truffle hadn't agreed with her, it had; but in the evening hours Fifi's asthma was always a bit troublesome. The Minister let her out to graze in the garden and turned back with a light heart to receive his guests.

A bare hour later the Comrade Vice-Commissar of Soviet Fisheries was already on his feet proposing a toast to

peace. Henri had turned the hated truffle into one of his most subtle triumphs, chopping it with shallots and mushrooms into a sauce of white wine thickened with butter and yolks of eggs.

To a man the Russians had mopped their plates with bread and asked for more, and now, over his second glass of an excellent champagne, the Minister was congratulating himself on a diplomatic success when the First Under-Secretary slipped a penciled note under his hand. The message read simply:

"FIFI IS DEAD."

The Minister mumbled his excuses and rushed into the kitchen.

"Call an ambulance!" he cried. "If the Russians die here in the Ministry, it will bring down the Government!"

His hand froze on the telephone. One ambulance would scarcely be adequate: there were sixteen in the delegation. The vision of sixteen ambulances, each bearing its Soviet diplomat, screaming and clanging out of the Quai d'Orsay, was quickly replaced with a mental tableau of sixteen distinguished corpses in sixteen hearses surging endlessly down the Champs Elysées in what would certainly be the most well-attended funeral in history. Every Communist in Europe

would march in that procession; there would be a general strike, and then—

In the dining hall another Comrade Commissar could be heard proposing another toast. "I give you," he said, "the French Revolution."

"That," thought the Minister, "is precisely what we're going to get." With sixteen honored guests of the Republic struck down at an official dinner in cold blood, revolution was only the beginning—this was war!

Dessert was just about to be served when a trustworthy doctor, under the strictest oath of secrecy, was smuggled into the Ministry and put to work with Henri in the kitchen. There are, it seems, only two effective antidotes for truffle poisoning, and it was felt that neither of them was sufficiently tasteless to risk introducing in the "Bombe Surprise." Obviously the antidotes would have to be surreptitiously administered and if world peace was to be preserved it could only be with the coffee.

"Turkish coffee," the First Under-Secretary urged, "Café Diable—laced with heavy spirits. Henri must arrange it."

The chef, mindful of his own responsibilities as a good Communist, labored mightily.

"Try some tabasco," sug-

gested the Minister, "or a bit of curry powder."

"Your Excellency," said Henri, spitting out a spoonful of the brew, "at one period of the Occupation I was implicated in a pâté of very young kittens. One has one's resources, but they are now exhausted: the effluvia of the clinic persists. Send for the stomach pumps and the priests—I know my limitations!"

And here the good man burst into tears of despair.

At this black moment there entered the Third Under-Secretary. He knew nothing of the present diplomatic contretemps, for his rank was not such as to admit him to the banquet. "I have been speaking to Madame," he said, "on the phone. She was most upset over the news about Fifi—"

The Minister cut him off

with an impatient gesture. "We are *all* upset," he said. "Indeed, we've felt the loss most keenly."

"Madame asks me to request that you fire the assistant gardener."

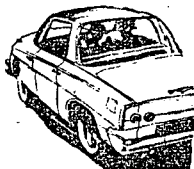
"This is hardly the moment for domestic trivialities. My God, man, we're on the brink of—"

"But the gardener left the gate open, and you know how Fifi always *would* run after cars—"

The Minister seized the Third Under-Secretary by the lapel of his coat, a lapel which will shortly be brightened with the rosette of the Legion of Honor.

"You mean—?" asked the Minister.

"Yes, the poor old thing tried it just once too often. A big delivery truck. Death was instantaneous. It was very sad."



Ellery Queen

Money Talks

Another short-short in E.Q.'s second most popular series of shorts—the series known as Q.B.I.: Queen's (Private) Bureau of Investigation. This case comes from the files of the Blackmail Department...

Detective: ELLERY QUEEN

BLACKMAIL SPEAKS ITS own peculiar dialect, but it has this advantage over other forms of expression: It is the universal language, understood by all.

Including the Sicilian. Mrs. Alfredo had heard its hissed accents, and she wept.

Ellery thought he had never seen a less likely victim. Mrs. Alfredo was as broad as a *gnoccho*, her skin had a time-grated Parmesan look, and her hands had been marinated in the Chianti of hard work. It seemed that she ran a very modest boardinghouse in the West Fifties which sagged under a mortgage. How, then, blackmail?

But then he heard about Mrs. Alfredo's daughter Lucia, and Lucia's Tosca, and how encouraging the Metropolitan Opera people had been about

Lucia's *Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore*, and Ellery thought he detected the sibilant accent, too.

Lucia's career was in jeopardy.

"On what ground, Mrs. Alfredo?" he asked.

The ground was foreign. In her youth Mrs. Alfredo had been a cook. One summer an employer had taken her to England, in England she had met an Englishman, and the Englishman had married her. Perfidious Albion! Within a month Alfred had vanished with her life's savings. What was worse, although eventually she recovered most of her money, the glamorous Alfred was discovered to possess another wife who claimed, and proved, priority. And what was worst, in inexorable course the poor woman found herself about to

have Alfred's baby. Mrs. Alfredo, as she had begun to call herself, fled Bloomsbury for her adopted land, posing as a widow and never telling anyone except Lucia her bigamous secret; and in the prehistoric days when a house could be bought with the widow's mite she had purchased the ancient property in the West Fifties which was now her livelihood and the hope of Lucia's operatic career.

"Long time I scare that Lucia's secret come out," she wept to Ellery, "but then a friend from Bloomsbury write me that Alfred die, so Lucia and I forget our shame. Until now, *Signor*. Now it comes out. If I do not pay the money."

The crudely lettered note had been pushed under her bedroom door. Five thousand dollars was demanded for silence about her daughter's illegal state. "How do they know, *Signor* Queen? Never do we tell anyone—never!" The money was to be placed under the loose newel post on the second-floor landing of her house.

"A boarder," said Ellery grimly. "How many boarders do you have, Mrs. Alfredo?"

"Three. Mist' Collins, Mist' —"

"Do you have five thousand dollars, Mrs. Alfredo?"

"Si. I do not pay off the mortgage—I save for Lucia's voice lesson. But if now I pay this money, Maestro Zaggiore give no more lesson! And if I do not pay, it will be known about me, about Lucia. It break Lucia's heart, *Signor*. Ruin her career. Already she is cry and cry over this."

"Young hearts take a heap of breaking and careers with real talent behind them don't ruin easily. Take my advice, Mrs. Alfredo: Don't pay."

"No," agreed Mrs. Alfredo with a certain cunning. "'Cause you catch him quick, hey?"

The next morning Mrs. Alfredo's newest boarder awakened in one of her feather beds to an enchantment. "*Un bel di*," sang Cho-Cho-San in Italian, "*vedremo levarsi un fil di fumo...*" The piano sounded as if it had served aboard the U.S. gunboat *Abraham Lincoln* along with Lieutenant Pinkerton, but the voice coming through the aged walls rang as sweet and rich as a newly minted coin. And Ellery rose, and dressed like a struggling writer just in from Kansas City, and went downstairs to Mrs. Alfredo's dining room determined that Lucia should have her chance.

At breakfast he met Lucia, who was beautiful, and the three boarders, who were not.

Mr. Arnold was small, thin, pedantic, and looked like a clerk in a second-hand bookshop, which was exactly what he was; Mr. Bordelaux was medium-sized, fat, garrulous, and looked like a French wine salesman, which was exactly what *he* was; and Mr. Collins was large, powerful, and slangy and if he had not turned out to be a taxicab driver Ellery would have turned in his honorary police badge. They were all three amiable, they took turns ogling Lucia and praising Mrs. Alfredo's *uova con peperoni*, and they departed—Mr. Arnold for his Cooper Square bookshop, Mr. Bordelaux for his vinous rounds, and Mr. Collins for his battered taxi—all in a perfect corona of innocence.

The next three days were incidental. Ellery ransacked Mr. Arnold's room and Mr. Bordelaux's room and Mr. Collins's room. In the evenings and in the mornings he studied his ABCs, as he privately called the three boarders, discussing books with Mr. Arnold, wines with Mr. Bordelaux, and nags and dames with Mr. Collins. He tried to reassure Lucia, who was tragically desperate. He tried to get Mrs. Alfredo's permission to take the note and her story to the police, for their assistance along certain lines he had in mind; Mrs. Alfredo became

hysterical. He advised her to deliver a note to the loose newel post saying that it would take a few days to raise the money. This she consented to do, and Ellery carefully refrained from insomnia that night, merely making sure that entry from outside the building would leave traces. And in the morning the note was gone and there were no traces. . . . Ellery did all the things one does in such cases, and what he gathered for his pains was the knowledge that the blackmailer was Mr. Arnold the book clerk, or Mr. Bordelaux the wine drummer, or Mr. Collins the taxi driver, and he had known that from the beginning.

But the fourth morning dawned with a bang. The emotional hand of Mrs. Alfredo was on his bedroom door, and its owner cried doom.

"My Lucia! She lock herself in her room! She does not answer! She is at least dead!"

Ellery soothed the frantic woman and hurried into the hall. From three doorways three heads protruded.

"Something wrong?" exclaimed Mr. Arnold.

"Is it that there is a fire?" cried Mr. Bordelaux.

"What gives?" growled Mr. Collins.

Ellery tried Lucia's door. It was latched from inside. He

knocked. No answer. He listened. He heard nothing.

"Dr. Santelli!" moaned Mrs. Alfredo. "I get *il doctore!*"

"Do that," said Ellery. "Collins, help me break this door in."

"Lemme at it," said the powerful Mr. Collins.

But the old door was like iron.

"The ax of the fire," howled Mr. Bordelaux; and he flew down the stairs after Mrs. Alfredo, carpet slippers flapping.

"Here," panted Mr. Arnold, appearing with a chair. "Let's have a look through that fanlight." He scrambled onto the chair and peered through the transom above the door. "She's on the bed. She's been sick—She's just lying there—"

"Any blood, Arnold?" asked Ellery anxiously.

"No . . . But there's a box of sweets. And a tin of something—"

"Oh, no," groaned Ellery. "Can you make out the label?"

Mr. Arnold's Adam's crab-apple bobbed before the little rectangular window above the door. "It looks like . . . rat poison."

At which Mr. Bordelaux appeared with the fire ax and Mrs. Alfredo with an excited gentleman in his undershirt who looked like Arturo Toscanini.

They all tumbled in to find that Lucia had attempted to commit suicide by filling some chocolates with rat poison and bravely swallowing them.

"*Molto, molto,*" said Dr. Santelli happily. "Her tummy rejects. All to go out!" And later, the doctor called Mrs. Alfredo and Ellery in, and he said: "Lucia. *Cara.* Open the eye."

"Mama," quavered Lucia.

"*'Bina,*" wept Mama.

But Ellery set Mama firmly to one side. "Lucia, the Met needs you—believe me! You're never to do such a foolish thing again. Anyway, you won't have to. Now I know who the blackmailer is."

CHALLENGE TO THE READER: *You now have all the facts. Pause and consider: Who is the blackmailer?*

"My clients will press no charge," Ellery said later to the silent man holding the suitcase, "so long as you're smart enough to keep their secret. I might add, before you go, that you're much too careless to make a successful blackmailer."

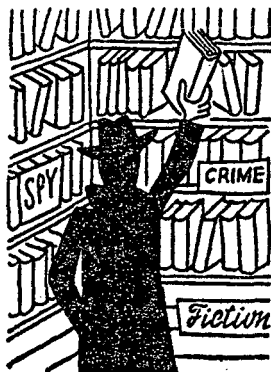
"Careless?" said the man sullenly.

"Oh, criminally. Mrs. Alfredo and Lucia had never told anyone about the illegal marriage. So the blackmailer must

have learned about it from the bigamist himself. But since Alfred was an Englishman who had lived—and died—in England, the great likelihood was that the blackmailer was English, too, you see. The simplest logic.

"You've tried very hard to conceal it, but in the excite-

ment of this morning's events you slipped. Only an Englishman would have called a rectangular transom a 'fanlight,' chocolates 'sweets,' and a can of poison a 'tin.' So if you're ever tempted to try a scoundrelly stunt like this again, my advice to you is—watch your language, Mr. Arnold!"



Philip Wylie

The Blizzard Murder Case

The evidence against Tony Andrews was overwhelming—motive, opportunity, means, all seemed to incriminate him hopelessly. Tony was in a desperate situation. But he was a businessman with brains, and surely his brains could save him—or could they?

A short novel complete in this volume by another famous literary figure . . . the kind of story that made the Golden Age of the Detective Story glow with an inner fire. Read and ratiocinate—but most of all, read and enjoy. . .

Detective: TONY ANDREWS

THE WIND BLEW harder and Tony looked out of the window with a feeling of apprehension. It was not a natural emotion to him. He watched battalions of snow charge at the chrome-steel gargoyle mounted outside his skyscraper apartment. The metal animal bit back at the storm—and the battalions whirled on.

It was uncanny, Tony thought. Uncanny, because, less than a week ago, he had been wearing a pith helmet to protect himself from drenching sunshine in South America.

A door opened. There was a fire burning in the grate and the opening of the door drove ashes from the hearth.

It was Tony's Filipino boy. He said, "Good evening, Mr. Andrews."

Tony nodded. He had had Pedro for three years—ever since the senior partner in his firm, David Cole, had come to him and said, "I want you to take my Filipino off my hands. He's a fine fellow and a superb cook, as you very well know, but I can't seem to get along with him. We've had two or three furious battles."

Pedro walked to the fire and held out his hands. His brown skin was tinged with blue and he was shivering. Snow still clung to his overcoat.

Tony wondered whether the fact that David Cole had fought

with the Filipino boy explained in part why he and Cole had argued so feverishly that afternoon. Maybe Cole was at bottom an irascible and unreasonable man.

Pedro took a newspaper from his coat pocket. "Your name in my paper three times." He walked across the room and Tony mechanically accepted the tabloid. "Page seven, page eighteen, page twenty-six. Marked in blue pencil."

Tony read. First, Cavalier's column. "Tony Andrews, popular bachelor-at-large, brought the third prettiest girl in New York to the fights last night..."

On page eighteen there was a picture of the Squadron M Polo Team, which, according to the caption, was to "defend its laurels on January 14th." Tony squinted at his likeness—as does every man of thirty-eight—to see if he had lost anything in the last ten years. He saw a broad-shouldered, level-eyed man, with a lot of curly hair.

Then he turned to the third mention of his name, which had been ringed in pencil by Pedro. It was a dignified financial advertisement: "Cole, Boyd & Andrews—Bonds."

That wasn't what he had been expecting; he looked farther, and finally said to Pedro, "I'm mentioned four

times. I made a speech at the Advertising Association today." He began to read aloud, with irony in his voice: "'Anthony Andrews, just returned from South America, stressed again his well-known thesis that a majority of the best brains in America go into business. 'Business creates the wealth which gives the scientist his laboratory and the musician his concert hall,' he said.'"

Tony threw the newspaper into a chair. "That's what I said, Pedro. Businessmen are brainy. And I haven't got brains enough to run my own business!"

The doorbell rang.

Pedro answered it. "Leslie Boyd was welcomed into the apartment by another puff of ashes and the scream of wind through the teeth of the gargoyle. The remaining partner in the firm of Cole, Boyd & Andrews was diminutive, electrical, and debonair. He was five feet two and he weighed less than one hundred pounds. His eyes were dancing and gray-green; his smile was quick and human."

Boyd was one of those rare undersized men who are obviously neither a martinet nor a self-adjudged Napoleon. His suit was eloquently tailored; an emerald glittered in his tie and two more on his fingers. He had

a passion for emeralds, and in his safe-deposit box was a world-famous collection of them.

The ashes from the hearth settled on the carpet. The wind stopped moaning and the snow fell evenly. Pedro went for highballs. Leslie Boyd quit smiling when he sat down. "I came over here, Tony, in spite of this blizzard—"

"—to tell me," Tony interrupted, "that I'm a fool to keep on fighting with Dave Cole."

Pedro brought the drinks and Tony dismissed him for the night.

Les waited till the Filipino was gone and then shook his head. "Not exactly. You've been to South America. You know the situation. I'm ready to admit that it's quite possible that Señor Alavo's mines don't warrant the issue. I'm perfectly willing to admit that if we sell ten million dollars' worth of bonds to our customers and they go blooey, it won't help our reputation as a firm. But you know Dave's temperament! You've had hundreds of fights with him! He likes to be unreasonable for a while and then have the pleasure of giving in and making everybody feel that he is doing a favor. If you had just shut up this afternoon instead of storming all over the office like a frustrated gangster,

he would have come around all right."

Tony's nod was a calm agreement. "I know it. Dave's just a little bit old-womanish. But, after all, I'd been there and I knew what I was talking about and he didn't. Les, I've half a notion to resign. More than half."

Boyd smiled again—unhappily. "Damn it, Tony, you know perfectly well that you'll cool off. Dave's an older brother to you. We three guys have been through a lot together and I'm not going to see you and Dave raising hell with each other. If I can't persuade you to let Dave have his head—even if it means we do have to take and sell a bunch of bum bonds—I'm going over to Dave's house and go to work on him. I think Dave would come to his senses if you let him alone, but if you fight with him he'll stand you off all winter. How about it? Tell him tomorrow morning that you made up your mind that the final decision is up to him. Tell him—"

Tony shook his head. He was as stubborn as Dave. But he was right. He knew he was right. "I'm sorry, Les, but I've decided to make an issue out of this. Either old Dave quits acting like a dictator or I leave the firm."

Les sighed, and lighted a cigarette. "The two best friends I have in the world are you and Dave, and I'm prepared to go to any lengths to keep you two birds from acting like bulldogs. I *have* prepared, in fact." He stood up. "But I guess I'm starting from the wrong end, huh?" His eyes twinkled. "I'll go talk to Dave, if I have to hire a snowplow to get there."

Tony didn't say anything.

Les paused at the door. "No hard feelings?"

Tony shook his head. "None. I'm awfully sorry, Les. I hate to hurt you, but I still insist that I must maintain my attitude."

Boyd chuckled. "Okay, Tony. I'll go down and see Dave. Good night."

"Good night." Tony could hear Les whistling as he waited for the elevator.

But Tony's mood had not been shaken. He sat down in front of the fire and for a long time he did not move . . .

When the telephone rang he swept back his right arm to take it up. "Hello?"

"Hello." It was Les's voice and he sounded excited. "Listen, Tony! You've got to get right down to Dave's apartment!"

"What's the matter?"

"Somebody's murdered him!"

"Be right there!"

Tony slammed down the telephone and started for his hat and coat. He put them on and grabbed his doorknob, and only then halted. Perhaps he should call the police—or Jack Raymond, the firm's lawyer. But Les would have done that. The thing to do was to get there, and get there fast . . .

David Cole lived on the top floor of a converted house on West Ninth Street. He had occupied it for twenty-two years. Mrs. Bunnell, his only servant, had been in his employ since he had fired Pedro. It was her custom to arrive at seven in the morning, prepare his breakfast, serve it, clean his apartment, and leave.

Tony paid the cab, bounded through the driving snow up the six brownstone steps to the vestibule, and rang Dave's bell.

The door latch didn't click.

He rang again.

There was still no answering click. Impatiently he hunted for his key ring. Dave had given both Les and himself duplicate keys to the apartment. Tony let himself in, went up four flights of stairs, and knocked on Dave's door.

There was a dark stairway behind him that led to the roof, which Dave used in the summer. The hall was wall-

papered with a ship design. There was a crimson carpet on the floor, a refectory table, a couple of antique Spanish chairs, and a sizzling radiator. The hall was hot.

Tony noticed those things because he waited a long time after his knock. He was surprised that Les hadn't clicked the door downstairs, or answered his pounding. Presently he unlocked the door with his own key and walked in. He closed the door behind him.

Dave was lying on his face on the floor between two sofas with his arms stretched out toward the grate, where a cannal coal fire was glowing. The hilt of a knife stuck up between his shoulder blades. He was wearing dinner clothes. Half a dozen lamps were lighted, but the room was big and the ceiling was so high it looked shadowy.

On a table behind one of the two facing sofas were a number of objects that had evidently been recently put there: three or four fishing rods, several boxes of spools of heavy line, two 9/0 reels, and a .45 automatic.

Tony saw all that in one long look. Then he raised his voice: "Les!"

There wasn't any answer. He took off his hat and started to take off his gloves, and changed

his mind without exactly deciding why. He crossed the living room, walked down a carpeted hall, opened a door, and turned on a light. The twin beds in Dave's guest room were covered, the closets were empty.

In Dave's own room the lights were burning and the bureau drawers pulled open. There was a copy of the *Wall Street Post* on the bed and a round spot in the pillow where Dave had lain while reading it. A gray suit with a blue stripe which Dave had worn in the office that day was hanging from one of the bureau drawers with a note pinned on it.

Tony walked over and read the note: "Mrs. B—Let's change cleaners. I'm tired of smelling like a benzine refinery."

On top of the bureau was a plush-covered case in which were half a dozen sets of studs and cuff buttons worth, Tony thought, after looking them over, a couple of thousand dollars. Beside the case in a clip were five \$100 bills, three \$20's, two \$10's, a \$5, and eight \$1's, as well as 93 cents in change. He looked into the bathroom. The tub was empty, but there were damp towels and puddles on the floor. Dave always bathed like a grampus.

The kitchen was in Mrs. Bunnell's perfect condition—

there was nothing even remotely out of place.

Tony went back to the living room and picked up the telephone. It was a hand phone and the wire was cut at the bottom of the mouthpiece. He decided to go out and get the police. He turned the knob of the front door and pushed, but something was blocking it and it wouldn't open.

He put his shoulder against it and pushed as hard as he could. Those two Spanish chairs had been quietly jammed between the door and the staircase while he was investigating the rear of the apartment.

He turned around fast, and in the mirror above the fireplace he saw that his face was ghastly white. The kitchen door had two locks on it, one a bolt driven by a key—but the key wasn't there.

He went back to the living room and looked at Dave's .45. It was loaded and it hadn't been used. He put it in his pocket. Underneath the .45 was a copy of the *New York Register* open to a page that had a seven-column advertisement for Wharton Bros., and a one-column news story. One of the subheads contained his own name: "A. G. Andrews says best brains are in business." Pencil'd on the front page was, "Boyd-14-B."

Tony stared at the newspaper article about brains. He was trapped with the murdered body of his best friend, with whom on that very afternoon he had had a quarrel so furious that they had almost come to blows—and in the presence of half a dozen other people. He needed brains. More, he thought, than he possessed.

He took out a cigarette. Before he snapped open his lighter he slowly drew a deep breath. There was perfume in the air, heavy but very faint. He could not identify it with a person. He knew only that he had smelled it before. So he postponed lighting his cigarette. The woman would have been sitting on the sofa, talking to Dave.

He walked to the back of one of the sofas and sniffed; but the perfume wasn't any stronger there. Then, after clenching one of his gloved hands tightly, he tried the opposite sofa. He sniffed along the top—right up to the place where it was soaked with blood—blood that blotted the back and the seat and the carpet between the sofa and the place where Dave lay. Right beside the stain the scent of the perfume was stronger, but Tony still couldn't recognize it.

He sat down across from the bloody upholstery, and then he

did light his cigarette. Dave was lying with his hands stretched out and palms flat. The position reminded Tony of something. He had seen Dave lying like that before. He remembered.

Dave was fifty-one but had kept himself in perfect physical shape—so perfect, in fact, that once or twice, when his age was mentioned, he had done a suspension press to show that there was still youth and vitality in his muscles. To do a suspension press one must lie face down on the floor, extend one's arms as far forward as possible, and, by pressing down with both palms, bow up one's entire body from hands to toes. Not very many people are able to do it.

Somebody had stabbed Dave, and Dave had tried to stand up and had fallen on his face, but he had made one last blind, terrific effort to get to his feet by pressing down with his outstretched palms. Then he had died.

There were ashes on Tony's cigarette and he got up and tapped them carefully into the coal grate. Then he sat down again, and he saw a little bit of white material almost concealed by the cushions on the opposite sofa. He stepped over Dave's body and pulled out a woman's handkerchief with the initials L. R. on it.

He smelled it—but the perfume in the room, the perfume on the upholstery, was not Loretta's. He put the handkerchief on the fire and watched it burn, and mixed up its ashes in the coals with the poker.

He was deathly frightened. Where was Les Boyd? What woman had been there besides Loretta? If Boyd had gone out to get the police, why weren't they here? And where was the person who had blocked the door? Who was he?

That was fear—but suddenly his fear turned to sheer horror.

He was staring at the handle of the knife in Dave's back.

It was the handle of an ordinary hunting knife, a brown, thick handle that gave a good grip. He had one exactly like it. Of course, he thought rapidly, hundreds of other people had such knives. Thousands.

Only—only, his knife was a little different.

The point was broken. He had broken it trying to kill a moray that he had hauled part way over the stern of a fishing boat in Florida. He had missed his first stab, deeply nicking the point of his knife against a bronze cleat.

His horror was due to a certainty that the knife in Dave's back was his own.

If so, who could identify it? Pedro . . . He had to look at that knife.

He knelt beside Dave's body, hesitated a moment, and then seized the hilt. It pulled out easily. The point *was* broken. His knife.

He looked at the fire—and the knife. It wouldn't burn. He ~~didn't~~ dare pocket it. Opening the window and throwing it into the street might be more dangerous than useful, because that sort of thing someone might witness. The best thing to do was to put the knife back. He could prove—

But he didn't have an alibi. He had gone out for supper alone and had been alone all evening. The waiter would remember that he had dined at Boland's, but not when or for how long. His heart was banging steadily. Somebody had picked up his knife in his apartment so that he would be convicted of Dave's murder.

He held the knife up to the fire to make sure it was his and, as he did so, the front door behind him slowly opened. He didn't hear it. Carefully he thrust the blade in the wound just as it had been. Then he felt cold air on his back, and as he sprang to his feet he whipped out Dave's automatic.

A girl stood there. A girl with silver-blond hair and gray

eyes. There was snow on her hat and shoulders.

Her name was Wanda Jones. She was Tony's secretary.

His fear faded and in its place came a sort of embarrassment. The girl also seemed embarrassed. She was thinking, perhaps, not that David Cole was dead, but that her employer would wonder why she was visiting his partner at night and without Tony's knowledge.

"You'd better come in and close the door," Tony said.

She did so, not looking toward the fireplace. "Who did it?"

"I don't know." On an impulse he looked into the hall. The two heavy Spanish chairs were in their places, where they had been when he had entered; so he closed the door again.

She took off her coat. "Maybe you'd better tell me about it."

At that time he did not realize how much the presence of Wanda Jones relieved his mind. For three years her graciousness and capability had made his office more human and more effective and a more desirable place to work. She was diplomatic and dependable and discreet. In three years he had gleaned only a hazy idea of her origin and her way of life. But he was glad she was there,

and he told her exactly what had happened, from the moment of Les's telephone call to the opening of the hall door.

Then he said to her, "How did you get in?"

"I have keys. Mr. Cole gave them to me this afternoon."

He looked at the girl with sudden jealousy. "Would you rather I didn't ask you any more questions about you and Dave?"

Miss Jones smiled. "I think it would be better if you asked me a lot more. Better still if I told you just what happened. And may I have a cigarette?"

He offered his case. They sat down. The back of a sofa screened Cole's body.

"At five this afternoon you left Mr. Cole's office after telling him flatly that you were against taking over Señor Alavo's bond issue."

"'Flatly' is a mild word for it."

"Immediately afterward Señora Alavo called up and told Mr. Cole that she was going to call on him this evening at nine—presumably to use her charm to help sell the bonds. Mr. Cole had argued in favor of them with you, but after you had gone he began to waver. He didn't seem to relish the idea of entertaining Señora Alavo—"

Tony nodded. "Latin, damn' good-looking, and probably

scared old Dave to death."

"—so he asked me if I would appear at nine thirty sharp, apparently to take some important dictation. His own secretary had gone. He gave me the keys to the downstairs door and this one, and told me he was sure that if I came in that way, and Señora Alavo were still here, she'd leave."

"No doubt," Tony said dryly.

That explained the perfume. He had connected the heavy aroma with the wife of their South American client the instant Miss Jones had mentioned her name. She had been there. Loretta Raymond had been there. Les Boyd had been there.

Possibly Miss Jones had been there earlier in the evening, and was now lying. Her story was pretty thin, but he wanted to believe it, and it had one element in its favor: David Cole was terrified of women, particularly of attractive women, and the South American banker's wife was young and dazzling and very shrewd.

"We'll go downstairs," he said, "and take a cab to the police station."

She put out her cigarette. "You're on the spot, Mr. Andrews," she said. "Does anybody know you're here?"

He shook his head.

"Did Mr. Boyd call you from here?"

"I assumed that he did, but there's no reason for that assumption—is there?"

"No," she answered.

He picked up the ashtray in which she had ground out her cigarette and walked across the room and tossed the stub on the fire, while she continued to talk. "If the police know you were here and that your own knife killed Mr. Cole—it will be difficult for you. They are bound to find out about the argument you and he had this afternoon. I think that you and I ought to go to the movies."

"What!"

She went on calmly. "That'll give both of us an alibi for the evening. On the way we can call Mr. Boyd. Of course, he may make all this precaution unnecessary. Have you seen any pictures lately?"

"I went to the opening of *The Arab*."

"Swell!" the girl said. "I've seen it, too, so we'll only have to go to the theater long enough to buy tickets and lose ourselves inside."

He shook his head. "If you think that I'm going to pretend that I haven't been here tonight you're mistaken."

"Then why did you keep your gloves on?"

He stared at her. Her face

was disarming. Was she kidding him? Was she part of somebody's scheme to enmesh him in the death of his partner? Or was she trying to help him out of appalling jeopardy?

He didn't know, but he did know that he was going to take a chance on Miss Jones. He made only one more brief compromise. "Why do you think it's so necessary for me to keep out of this?"

The girl's voice was bitter. "Do you know anything about the police, Mr. Andrews? Because I do. Plenty. You'll have trouble enough if they identify that knife. But if they knew you had been here, you'd be in jail tonight without bail."

"I still think we ought to call them."

"The police," she answered, "are cruel and stupid."

Tony put Dave's automatic back on the table. They went out and closed the door. They saw nobody in the halls. Out on the street the storm was raging and the night seemed to be colder still . . .

While they were walking down the stairs the front window of David Cole's apartment was opened from the outside by two men who were standing on a little iron balcony. The icy dementia of the night boiled into the warm living room, and it was followed

by the feet of the two men.

Their uniforms were covered with snow. They were stiff from bending over in the shadow and listening through the crack they had made at the bottom of the window. They had reached their peculiar post of observation just as Tony took the knife from Cole's back. One of them was young and the other was old.

"So we're stupid?" said the former.

The older man grinned without amusement. "That's what she said, Lieutenant."

"Let's get to work."

Miss Jones jumped out of a taxicab and into a cigar store and dialed Leslie Boyd's apartment in the Brail Hotel; but there was no answer to her call so she went back to the cab. It dropped them at 48th Street and Broadway. Tony bought two tickets to *The Arab* and they went in. They watched the picture for twenty minutes and left the theater by a side exit.

The girl went into a drug store, and came back, reporting that she had tried Boyd but that there was still no answer.

After that Tony took charge. "We're going to see Raymond." Raymond was the firm's lawyer.

Miss Jones said, "That's right."

Raymond lived on East 61st Street in a private house. He opened the door. His greeting was genial and he led them into a big room elaborately furnished.

"Sit down, old man. I can guess what's brought you here. Dave still wants to sell that bond issue and Les is on the fence as usual. All right. I am on your side."

He was a big man, with cheerful gray eyes.

Tony had an idea. "Where were you earlier this evening?"

"Where but here? Home alone. Loretta's out, but she'll be back after the theater." He chuckled. "She told me that you asked her last night if you could be my son-in-law." His eyes were mischievous. "I warned her that she could never reform you but I gave my permission. I think she's going to accept you, my boy. She's a fine girl, Tony, but if you marry her you'll have to hit her over the head with a beer bottle every week or so."

For some reason Tony looked at Miss Jones. She was quite pale.

"I called you up about nine thirty tonight," Tony said, "and there was no answer."

It was a lie. He wanted to see how Jack Raymond would take it—and Raymond looked utterly baffled. "But that can't

be! I was right here, and nobody called."

Tony nodded. "That's right, Jack. I was just checking up on you . . . Listen, Jack. Dave is lying in his apartment with my knife through his back."

Raymond took a cigar from the humidor. He had trouble lighting it. He said, "You didn't—?"

Tony shook his head. "No, Jack, I didn't." He told his story. All of it—the precise truth.

When Tony finished, Jack picked up the telephone and called Les Boyd. There was still no answer. He turned from the instrument. "When do you think they'll find Dave's body?"

Tony's lips were compressed. "Mrs. Bunnell. In the morning."

"I suggest we go over to Les's place and wait for him."

"All right," Tony said.

In the hall, as they put on their coats, Jack Raymond expressed a feeling Tony had kept back. "Old Dave! That guy was just like my brother."

Tony swallowed hard. Like an older brother, he thought. Dave Cole had picked him from a long list of customers' men and made him a partner and taught him the business. Tony was richer and wiser and happier because of Dave—and somebody had murdered Dave.

They'd find that murderer! Sometimes the three men fought furiously over policy—as they had that afternoon—but it was only superficial fury. It never ended in malice.

Tony's steady gray eyes met Jack Raymond's. "Yeah. Dave was like a brother to all of us. Come on."

"I'll take the subway home," Miss Jones said. "You've got your alibi as well established as it can be. If you decide not to use it, though, let me know."

It was 11:15. As they started down the front steps of Raymond's house a limousine stopped in the deepening snow and the chauffeur helped Loretta Raymond out of the car. Jack Raymond told his daughter that they were on a business errand and would be back in a little while.

Loretta whispered in Tony's ear, "I decided yes." He had a glimpse of her swift-line profile and her stormy red hair. He caught her hand and squeezed it.

With Jack, then, he walked to a subway entrance. They said good night to Miss Jones.

It was only a half dozen blocks to the Brail Hotel. Tony walked across the lobby to the desk and asked for Mr. Boyd.

"He left town, sir," the clerk said.

Tony was stunned.

Jack realized the necessity of showing no emotion at that instant and said to the clerk, with apparent calm, "At what time did he leave?"

"Well over an hour ago."

"I'm Mr. Andrews," Tony cut in, "his partner."

"Yes, Mr. Andrews, I recognized you."

"Did Mr. Boyd say where he was going?"

"No, sir. He simply called up and asked that his bags be sent to him."

"He was packed, then?"

The clerk nodded. "Yes, sir. Our instructions were to put the bags in Lower 6—" The clerk rummaged through a stack of memoranda. "—Lower 6 in Car 176 on the ten o'clock for Montreal."

"Was Mr. Boyd aboard the train when your boy delivered the bags?"

"No, sir."

"I think we'd better go up to Boyd's room," Jack said.

The clerk gave them a key.

Leslie Boyd's apartment was in the mild disorder that results from hasty packing.

Tony sat down heavily. "I guess that's the answer, Jack. Les did it. Used my knife. Called me over there and shut me in when I arrived. Probably intended to keep me in there long enough so that I'd leave plenty of fingerprints, and then

took the chairs away. I guess I don't need my alibi—such as it is. It's a mess, isn't it?" Drearily he walked toward the door.

"Going home?" Jack asked.

"I thought I'd go over and talk to Loretta first. Who knows but when I get home the cops may be there waiting to carry me off to jail."

The lawyer put his arm around Tony. "You won't have to worry about that! Even if they identify that knife, I know at least five hundred ways of keeping people out of jail."

They thanked the clerk for letting them into Les Boyd's apartment, then went out into the night.

Loretta was waiting for them in the living room.

Jack Raymond glanced at his daughter and said, "You won't mind if I excuse myself? I am speaking with what is popularly called elaborate sarcasm. I'll be upstairs if she throws anything Tony."

Tony looked at the girl who had said she would become his wife—firelight on her red hair and bright little points of flame in her eyes. Her father's amused kidding about her temper and her behavior was not altogether unfounded.

Tony was fond of her. She was exciting. For four or five years he had often been in her company, and a casual habit of

saying, "You and I really ought to get married, Loretta," had eventually made him decide that he would ask her to marry him and tame her a little bit, and perhaps himself in the process, and raise sons and daughters who would be just as unmanageable and dramatic years later.

He had stood looking at her for a long time.

"Would you like a drink?" she said.

"No. What were you doing in Dave's apartment tonight?"

The fires in her eyes burned higher. "You think I was in Dave's apartment this evening? Were you there, Tony?"

"Peeking through a key-hole," Tony answered placidly.

Loretta looked toward the ceiling in a mockery of dismay. She said, "Alas! Then you know all! For years I have been madly in love with Dave. Tomorrow we are going to fly together to the ends of the earth! I chose him rather than you because he is richer than you are, and my poor father's gambling in the market has reduced us to poverty!"

She struck a caricatured posture of despair.

Tony did not smile. "Dave was murdered tonight with my hunting knife and I found your handkerchief on the sofa. I burned it."

Loretta turned to stone. Finally she said, "Thanks."

Tony walked over to her and took her by the arms. "Well?"

Her eyes met his directly. "What I said is sort of true, Tony." Her voice was a miserable whisper. "When I was eighteen I was infatuated with Dave. I wrote him a lot of letters. You asked me to marry you yesterday, so I thought I'd better ask him if he kept the letters."

"You're a fool." He chuckled her under the chin, then kissed her.

Loretta drew a long breath. "Dave said he had destroyed the letters as fast as I wrote them. I left his place about eight o'clock, Tony, because I had to go to the theater. He was alone and alive when I left him."

Later—much later—Tony went into the hall and got his coat. The storm was still raging. He beat snow from his shoulders as he went up in the elevator to his lofty apartment.

Pedro was there—looking frightened. Lieutenant Doyle and Sergeant McCluskey were also there. They didn't tell him that, crouched in the storm, they had watched him in Dave Cole's apartment. They described briefly the circumstances in which they had discovered the body.

Tony leaned against the mantel and smoked and looked at the men. They had ruddy, bartender-like faces and eyes that did not look either innocent or intelligent.

The lieutenant finished his description of the finding of the body.

Tony said, "That's horrible, Officer."

McCluskey turned toward his superior. "He don't seem very surprised."

The lieutenant nodded. "What about it? McCluskey's right."

Tony answered quietly, "I'm not a hysterical woman, you know."

"This is a very poor time for you to get flip, Mr. Andrews."

Tony scrutinized his cigarette. "Perhaps I feel a great deal more grieved by Dave's death than either of you would understand. Perhaps I don't care to share that grief with strangers."

Not his face, but the back of Doyle's neck, became red. "The ritz, eh? Mind condescending to tell us what you did tonight? From seven o'clock on."

Tony said, "I had dinner alone at Boland's. It was Pedro's day off. I came back here and read a book about South America. Right behind you on the table, Lieutenant. Mr. Boyd—my other partner—

dropped in for a while." He explained briefly the uncompleted South American bond negotiations. "I had an appointment to take my secretary to see a motion picture that we had discussed this morning—"

"Very interesting," said the lieutenant. "What's her name?"

"Wanda Jones," Tony replied steadily, "2334 Clansdale Avenue, Woodmere. We went to the picture, and then I called on my attorney. I have just come back."

Lieutenant Doyle reached into an inside pocket and took out Tony's knife. "That's all we want to know, Mr. Andrews. Between eight and nine you killed your partner with this knife. It's yours, isn't it?—Your Filipino identified it."

Pedro overrode his terror enough to speak for the first time. "I said I thought it looked like one you have. It's gone."

Tony took his knife, "I had one like this with a nick in the point. If mine's gone, I suppose this is mine."

Doyle turned to his aide. "Put the bracelets on him, McCluskey."

Tony didn't move, but there was authority in his voice. "Keep the bracelets in your pocket, McCluskey. Do you boys want to be demoted for false arrest? And how about the suit I'd slap on you? And

where's the warrant? . . . Look here. That knife has been in my house all winter and I've entertained hundreds of people. It might have been gone for months. It was in a drawer with a lot of junk. Dave might have taken it himself, because he was planning a fishing trip and came over here to borrow some of my tackle. If my knife killed him it doesn't mean anything. But think this over: Leslie Boyd, the other partner in our firm, went to see Dave this evening. He told me he was on his way there when he came here this evening. Mr. Raymond, our lawyer, and I went over to Boyd's hotel tonight. About ten o'clock this evening Boyd had his bags put in Lower 6 in Car 176 on the train for Montreal. Why don't you boys stop Boyd before he gets out of the country?"

The policemen hesitated.

"Now get the hell out of here," Tony said.

Lieutenant Doyle meditated laboriously. Finally he asked the name of Boyd's hotel, telephoned, and checked up on Tony's story. He stood up. McCluskey stood up.

"Okay, we'll let you alone for the present, Mr. Andrews. I hope it won't disturb you none to have somebody tailing you."

"None," said Tony.

In the morning with his

pre-shower cup of coffee Tony read the story on page one. He thought that police headquarters had given out an unusual amount of information and that the reporters had done a particularly accurate job.

He did not know about the two men who had watched him through the window. He did not know that the police were smugly playing cat-and-mouse with him. The story told him two new things: first, that the medical examiner had set the time of Dave's death between seven and nine of the previous evening; second, that the police were concentrating on finding Leslie Boyd.

"Mr. Boyd," the newspaper story went on, "had informed no one of his intention to leave New York, but at about 9:30 he telephoned to the clerk at the Brail Hotel and ordered that his bags be placed in Lower 6 in Car 176 on the Montreal train. His bags were found to be packed and ready and were taken by a bellboy, Perry Wheaton, to the train. Wheaton reports that Mr. Boyd was not yet aboard and that he left the bags as he had been instructed to do.

"Conductor J. B. Carley, reached by the police at Rouses Point, on the Canadian border, states that Mr. Boyd was aboard the train and that he took up

his ticket. Mr. Boyd had already retired when he reached Car 176. The train was held at Rouses Point, where it was found that Boyd was no longer in his berth and his baggage was gone. The train had stopped at Albany, but the porter is positive that Mr. Boyd did not get off at that point.

"However, the blizzard which raged last night delayed and frequently halted the express, so that it is conceivable that Mr. Boyd could have descended at any of a dozen points along the way. A statewide search for him has been instituted."

When Tony left his apartment to go to the office it was still snowing, so he hopped into a taxicab. When his cab started, another one left the hack stand in its wake. Tony looked out his rear window and made a face at the plainclothes man who was following him.

His office was in a state of chaos which became a stiff silence when he entered. He lifted his voice: "Listen, everybody. I know how you all feel today. Many of you have known Dave Cole and Les Boyd even longer than I, but I don't think any of you will miss Dave more than I do. I want all of you to go on with your work as well as you can. It will be difficult but it's the best solace "

He halted. The simple dignity with which he had spoken of the senior partner was marred when he spoke about the third member of the firm. "Until Mr. Boyd—returns—I shall assume responsibility for all transactions. Marvin, I want to talk to you and Fletcher and Graham. You can all come in together now."

He felt bleak and alone as he walked past his silent employees. Then he entered his office and saw Wanda. He smiled at her and shut the door. "I used our alibi—though I guess we didn't need it."

She nodded. She looked as if she hadn't slept. "Yes. The police phoned me late last night."

She left the office when Fletcher entered with Graham and Marvin. For two hours the four men discussed the affairs of the firm.

When the men had gone, Tony rang for Miss Jones, and she came in with her book. He had left his desk and was looking out of the window.

"Yes, Mr. Andrews?"

He still stood with his back to her. "I want to ask you some questions."

"All right."

"What do you know about the police that made you say last night they were stupid?"

Her answer came in a slow

monotone. "My father was head of the bond department in a bank in the West. It doesn't matter where. It doesn't matter what his name was. Somebody underneath him embezzled a lot of money. Police investigators blamed him. Some of the evidence did point toward him, more or less, but he was innocent. Father was also interested in politics. He—was against the administration in our city. He"—her voice dropped—"signed a confession."

"Good Lord!" Tony turned around. The girl was sitting limply in her chair.

"They beat it out of him. He was sent up for five years. He died there."

"But couldn't somebody—?"

"Somebody could have, but nobody did. I tried. I went to newspapers. I wrote letters. I talked. The courts took everything away from us, but I kept on—even after he was dead. Then one night a couple of men came around and told me that I'd better not stay in—in that city—any more." She was silent.

"So you came here with a different name?"

Her eyes looked into him and through him and beyond him. "I knew a lot about the bond business. I decided to get a job somewhere and stick at it until I had a chance to lay my

hands on a large sum of money. Then I was going to use that money to get the men who killed my father—the judge, the president of the bank, the policemen who beat him—everybody."

"Get them?" Tony echoed.

The girl smiled a little. "Oh—for days I thought that. Weeks. I didn't care what I did. Then—I got just such a job—working for you. I found out that there were some decent men in business, and of course I got over the idea I had for revenge, and of course I fell in love with you—"

She added that last remarkable statement in the same monotone she had used to express the story of her tragedy.

Tony walked across the room and sat down on a corner of his desk facing her. "You did that too, did you? When?"

She cast down her eyes and spoke almost in a whisper. "When? In the first month or week or minute. The time doesn't matter. The whole thing doesn't matter. I fell in love with you, and it gave me something to think about besides father. I imagined you knew all about it. My being in love, that is."

Tony nodded slowly. "I suppose I did. I never thought about it consciously, though,

not once in my life." He pondered for a moment. "You're telling me this now because I'm engaged to Loretta?"

She nodded wretchedly. He didn't know what his own feelings were. The girl just sat there with her face averted. If she had even looked at him or tucked in a curl of her silver-blond hair—it would have changed his feeling. That would have meant that her avowed emotion was not too deep to interfere with the conscious little businesses of being feminine.

But Wanda did nothing. She let him see her—drawn, sleepless, miserable, and utterly without hope.

Presently she said, "I've succeeded in adding more weight to the burden you already carry. I think I would rather have died than have told you—what I just did."

"Taking a woman seriously," Tony replied after some time, "is not my habit. It's apt to drive you crazy. That's why I was certain to marry Loretta, or somebody like her. She'd be the first person to maintain that it was a mistake to take her with too much seriousness. In the office I try to look at people as people, and not as men and women. Again—that's why I wouldn't let myself think of

you as anything but a secretary."

"I understand all those things."

"Sure, you do. Now."

She stood up, went to the door, opened it, looked back, and smiled slightly. His smile in response was just as slight.

He was still standing looking at the door through which the girl had gone when the intercome buzzed. "Señor and Señora Alavo would like to see if you can spare the time, Mr. Andrews."

"Send them in."

The South American was tall and olive-tinged. He bought his clothes in England. His wife also was tall. She had long black hair heaped voluptuously at the back of the neck. Her clothes came from Paris. One could imagine the Alavos in any setting so long as it was extravagant; but the Alavos, as they entered Tony's office, did not look urbane.

Tony said, "Sit down. Cigarette, Señora? Cigar, Alavo?"

He held a match. Both of them were trembling.

"Naturally," said the South American, "I did not murder your partner, Mr. Cole."

"Mr. Cole favored acceptance of your bonds." Tony hesitated. "I was against the proposition."

Tony had been looking at Señora Alavo, his attention drawn to her by the mnemonic scent of the perfume she wore. It brought, into his memory a picture of the sofa with a blood-soaked back.

Tony moved his eyes from her to the banker. "But no one has accused you of having anything to do with this tragedy."

"The police have been most polite." Alavo paused. "I assume that there is no further hope for my enterprise?"

Tony shook his head. "I was frank before, Alavo. I went down to South America and looked over the property and the reports. Your bank seemed sound—although there were plenty of rumors that it wasn't. I don't doubt that the ore in those mountains is worth a hundred times the sum you are trying to raise; but it's going to be expensive to get it out, and the market isn't stable."

Alavo nodded. "Your firm is the only one left to which I could go." He smiled briefly, ruefully. "My one hope of success was that Mr. Cole would override your veto." He shrugged. "Since I am now without a champion I will say to you, confidentially, that to return to my country without success will unquestionably mean the ruin of my bank as well as the

mining corporation. My wife knew all these things. That's why she went, without my knowledge, to plead with Mr. Cole."

The woman stood up dramatically and cried out. "He was alive when I left him! I swear it!"

Alavo shouted, "Isabella! Be silent!" At that instant he was not a suave banker but a Latin husband giving orders to his Latin wife.

"This procedure"—Alavo was furious—"is, naturally, intolerable to me. I do not know what method my wife used in an attempt to persuade your partner—"

The woman began to cry.

Tony felt angry. "Look here, Alavo. If you came in here to show me how furious you were, or to punish your wife, you can get out right now. I'd like to ask your wife some questions and I'd rather you didn't go on making a fool of yourself."

Alavo was on his feet, white and trembling. "If you said that to me in South America, young man—"

"This isn't South America, Alavo, and you can go back to your chair and sit down—or get out." He said that because the banker was slowly tiptoeing toward him, in a delirium of rage. "Have you told the police?" Tony asked.

"Naturally not." The mention of police brought Alavo back to his senses. He sat down.

Tony turned his attention to the woman. "Just what did you do, Señora?"

She answered dully, without glancing at her husband, "He—went to a dinner. He told me he would be back late. I was to dine in my room. I decided to see Mr. Cole myself. It was my intention to call on you also and on Mr. Boyd. I was afraid"—she shuddered—"of ruin. I telephoned Mr. Cole late in the afternoon to tell him I was coming to see him. I went to his apartment. He was very kind. He said he had no intention of giving up his position on our bond issue. He said that he expected to convince Mr. Boyd and override your veto. I couldn't have been there more than fifteen minutes."

"Where did you sit?" Tony asked.

Her dark eyes met his with surprise, but she had herself in hand. "I sat at the end of the sofa on which he was stabbed."

Alavo shouted, "How do you know which sofa he was stabbed on?"

She shrank from her husband but she answered steadily, "There have been diagrams of that room in the morning newspapers. Naturally, I rea-

lized Mr. Cole had been stabbed in the middle of the very sofa on which I had been sitting."

Her statement checked with Tony's own observations. No doubt she perfumed her hair. "What time was it?"

"I left my room at the hotel at a quarter past eight last night."

"Say, from a quarter of nine till nine, then?"

"I should think so. It was about nine thirty when I returned. My husband was in my room waiting for me. He had deliberately lied to me about being out all the evening. He is jealous. He knew that I was acquainted with many people in New York." Ashamed and bitter, she pulled up one of her sleeves, and Tony saw on her wrist four ugly purple bruises.

That revelation again drove Alavo into a quivering rage.

Tony looked at him coldly and said, "You're an awful nice fellow, Alavo. You didn't by any chance follow your wife down to Dave's apartment, and go up there after she'd left and pick up my knife from that mess of fishing tackle and stab him?"

"He followed me, yes," the woman said.

Alavo slapped his wife on the mouth. The blow was fierce. She didn't cry out or

faint, but merely covered her mouth with her hand. The South American stood up then and said through his clenched teeth, "Come, Isabella."

Rage of that sort is contagious. Tony didn't entertain even so minute a thought as that Alavo was a skunk. His brain merely stopped working. Nobody could sock a woman in his office.

Alavo was standing in front of him and Tony got up fast, bringing a haymaker with him. It knocked the banker backward. He collapsed in a chair—out cold.

Wanda Jones entered the room with a sheaf of letters in her hand.

Señora Alavo slowly shook her head and said, in a low, crazed tone, "But he didn't do it, Mr. Andrews. He was back in the hotel before I returned—and when I left Mr. Cole, the knife—and all that fishing tackle—were not on the table."

She wiped her mouth with a handkerchief, because it was bleeding.

Tony turned toward his secretary. "Take Señora Alavo to the washroom." The two women went out.

He stood over the unconscious South American, thinking. A month ago, when Alavo had first come up from South America, and before Tony had

made his flying trip to investigate Alavo's property, there had been a cocktail party at Tony's apartment. Cole, Boyd, Alavo, his wife—the usual crowd.

Suppose Alavo had picked up the knife at that time? Picked it up, because it had a nick in it and could be identified? Alavo was desperate. He might even have thought that a murder would be necessary to save his cause.

But in that case, Tony thought, it would have been himself or Boyd, rather than Cole, whom Alavo would have killed.

He walked over to his desk and picked up his thermos carafe. He poured icy water on Alavo's face. As he was doing that Lieutenant Doyle walked through the door from the outer office and said, "What's going on here?"

Tony replied grimly, "Señor Alavo is out cold."

"You didn't kill him, did you?"

Tony glared. "I knocked him out. What are you doing here?"

Doyle bent over the South American. His eyes were still closed but he was moving. "I just wanted to talk things over with you."

Señor Alavo looked up into the policeman's face and then at Tony. He scrambled to his

feet. "I've been framed! I didn't go into Cole's apartment! I sat outside in my car!"

The lieutenant said, "We've checked on you. We had your driver at the station for two hours this morning. And unless he's a better liar than most people, you didn't go into Cole's apartment."

Things began to happen very rapidly then. Wanda came in with Mrs. Alavo. Already frightened, she sank in terror on a chair when she saw the policeman.

Tony tried to explain. "The Alavos came down to tell me that Mrs. Alavo had gone to Dave's apartment last night. They had a family row and he socked her, so I socked him."

Doyle smiled mirthlessly at Tony. "You knew I was outside, and when this alibi fell in your lap you put it on ice with a good, hard right. You think awfully fast, Mr. Andrews. It just happens that we think a little faster down at headquarters. This time I've got a warrant."

"What warrant?" Tony said.

"The warrant for your arrest for the murder of David Cole. Mr. Boyd called us last night. We didn't just go busting into Cole's apartment. McCluskey and I got into the one below and climbed up to the balcony above and looked in the

window. We were watching you in the living room."

He turned to Miss Jones. "You, too, Miss Jones—and we'll take you along as a material witness. You see, we got there just before you arrived on the scene."

Wanda drew in a shivering breath.

Alavo walked over to his wife and took her arm. "We may leave?"

Doyle nodded. "I'll be up at your hotel to talk to you later this afternoon."

Tony was looking at this lieutenant. His mind ran like a speeded-up motion picture. They had seen him in Dave's living room, wearing gloves. They had seen him pull out the knife. They had heard all his conversation with Wanda. No doubt they thought that, having been surprised by his secretary, he had smoothly lied out of his predicament.

Doyle's next words revealed the accuracy of that guess. "You've gotten yourself in a lot of trouble by falling for your boss, Miss Temple!"

The girl sat down. "So you found that out . . . already."

"It was a cinch! Come on, Andrews. Come on, Miss Temple. Apparently you take after your father."

The cruelty of that remark sent so violent an emotion

through Tony that he would have knocked out the lieutenant as he stood there, if Wanda hadn't managed to grab his arm.

Doyle didn't waste any more time. He pulled out his gun; he handcuffed Tony; he directed them to walk through the outer office. Into the consternation caused by his appearance, handcuffed, Tony bawled one order: "We're being arrested! Get Raymond, somebody!"

"It's a pretty tough spot," Jack Raymond said. His ordinarily affable face was furrowed with anxiety. "Why in hell didn't you look out the front window?"

Tony Andrews grunted. He shifted his weight on the laced steel straps that formed the bed in his cell in the Tombs. "Who in hell would look for people hanging on the front of a building in a blizzard?"

Raymond nodded. "All right. All right. Didn't they see you go to the door and try to get out in order to call the police?"

"They got there later than that." Tony shook his head like a prizefighter trying to clear away the effect of too many blows. "I'd like to know what those fellows think I killed Dave for! Of course, I had a row with him. And a violent

one. We'd had dozens. Miss Abbott, Dave's secretary, told the cops I called Dave a 'wall-eyed baboon' and a 'chiseling screwball'! But those aren't terms you address to a man you're thinking of murdering."

The lawyer leaned forward, gripped Tony's shoulder, and shook him gently. "You haven't got a lawyer for nothing, Tony. In the first place, they'll never be able to pin it on you while Boyd is missing. In the second place, when they do find Boyd they'll probably find their answer. Moreover, I may be able to change the charge against you and bail you out. I may be able to get a habeas corpus. The Commissioner is an old friend of mine and so is the District Attorney. There are a dozen ways out of this."

Tony nodded more calmly. "What about Miss Jones?"

"They were still talking to her when I came over here."

"Bail her out," Tony said.

Raymond looked thoughtfully at his friend. "Sure. I thought you'd want that."

He started toward the door. Tony caught his arm. "I'll tell you one thing you might try right now. If Les actually did kill Dave it might have been about money. Nobody knew just how Les stood, or what he spent. You might get a couple

of certified public accountants to check over all our books—just as a—well—”

Jack nodded slowly. “All right, Tony. Good. I’ll put them on it immediately.”

They had arrested Tony on Thursday morning. On Friday he was still in jail. The police inspector came to see him and talked to him for several hours.

On Saturday the Commissioner came. Tony knew him slightly, but acquaintanceship did not make their interview a friendly one. Tony went over his story once again, but wrathfully. He swore with fervor that as soon as his name was cleared he would sue every officer in New York. The Commissioner was at first sympathetic but finally cold and withdrawn.

On Saturday, Jack Raymond called for the third time. He reported that accountants, working through the night, had found no trace of theft or embezzlement from the firm. All his schemes for liberating Tony had collapsed. He agreed to move his office temporarily into Tony’s on Monday to take charge of the neglected affairs of Cole, Boyd & Andrews.

By Sunday afternoon Tony was in a state of high jitters. When a guard came by and said that Miss Raymond wanted to

see him, he welcomed Loretta feverishly. She kissed him. She talked such voluble mush that the guard sheepishly walked out of earshot. Then she told Tony that her father was still working desperately, that she believed him innocent, that she wanted to marry him the minute he got out, and that he shouldn’t take it so hard.

“You know,” she said, “you’re just wearing yourself out foolishly. Everybody’s convinced that your story is true. The police seem to wish they hadn’t been so hasty about arresting you. Father even seems to think it’s a little bit funny that you were put in the cooler. You know you were awfully sure of yourself, Tony. This will be a good lesson to you.”

Such statements might have angered another man, but, oddly enough, they served to calm him. For three days he had been acting like a trapped tiger—pacing his cell, refusing his food, and doing very little thinking.

When Loretta had kissed him again and departed, Tony walked to the barred window of his cell and glared at the bitter blue sky. He had been behaving like a school kid. It was time to quit.

After a long period of quiet thinking Tony walked to the

door of his cell and called the guard. He handed him a ten-dollar bill, "I want you to see if you can get hold of Miss Wanda Jones—that is, Miss Temple—and have her come here as soon as possible."

He gave the guard Wanda's telephone number in Woodmere.

It wasn't quite regular, but ten dollars was ten dollars and the guard knew where he could reach a colleague who was off duty and could telephone.

Tony didn't have to receive visitors in the steel-barred room with the little wickets for talking, as did the other prisoners. It was a privilege his prominence allowed him. When they brought Wanda to his cell it was almost dark. Her cheeks were very red but that was due to the cold. Her smile was pale.

The policeman stood outside for this interview, acting on orders he had received the minute Tony's new visitor announced her name.

Wanda sat down and said, "I wanted terribly to see you, Mr. Andrews, but I was afraid that my coming here would only make things worse for you."

Tony nodded and glanced at the listening policeman. "I'm glad you decided to come." He said that to cover the bribe to the guard, and for a moment she almost gave the guard away

by saying that she had been summoned. But in another moment she understood.

Her reply was composed. "I thought that there might be things you want done in the office tomorrow."

She had a mind, Tony thought. "Quite right. There are a lot of things that you've got to take care of for me and others you've got to explain to Jack Raymond. He's going to take over at the office until I get out."

He watched the policeman as he ticked off twenty or more business details—details that included the names of all his partners, sums of money, cities, corporations, bond prices, and other data. In the midst of his recitation he included the statement he had summoned Wanda to hear.

He had just said, "You will find in David Cole's desk, no doubt, the complete mineralogical reports on A. T. B. and J."

A. T. B. and J. meant nothing to Wanda, so that she was doubly alert to what he said next: "In Mr. Boyd's armoire the residuary habilliments will give me an index of the direction he intended to take in that line."

Wanda's eyes flickered for a second. What Tony had conveyed was that the clothes remaining in Leslie Boyd's

room at the hotel would, by revealing what he had packed in his two suitcases, show more or less where he had intended to go on the fateful night.

Wanda said, "I'll check that up."

The policeman had not noticed anything unusual. The use of such words as "residual" and "index" had a financial sound. It was, he reported to his superior later, simply a business conversation.

On the following day Tony waited impatiently for Wanda. He was filled with a new hope, because now he was doing something to help himself. He had discovered what he thought might be a new line of investigation. He had discovered it by thinking about Les Boyd.

It was not like that debonair, gay little man to run out on danger unless he had an impressive reason for doing so. There might have been such a reason. Nobody could tell how much Les had known about the murder, and he might have been following the killer of David Cole or tracking down a clue to his murder.

Les had obviously started on the train to Montreal, but nobody could prove how long he had stayed on that train. Certainly he had no business in Canada so far as Tony knew. Quite possibly he had used the

Canadian train as a blind to make some other journey.

Nobody had actually seen him on the train. He had presented his tickets from a curtained berth and he might easily have left the train near New York, come back into town, and taken another. Thus, he could have traveled South, or flown South. That was why Tony wanted to know what clothes were left in his hotel apartment.

If Les had been intending to go to Montreal he would have provided himself with clothing for a cold climate. But if he had been going South his two suitcases would have contained a different kind of clothing.

Wanda came during her lunch hour. She looked excited, so Tony knew that his idea had brought some sort of result. They had expected to be forced to use the same deceptive methods by which he had asked her to make the search, but this time the guard allowed them privacy.

Wanda broke her recitation of business facts the moment the guard was out of earshot. "I didn't dare go to the hotel to ask about the clothes, of course. But I know a newspaper reporter quite well. He got a copy of the complete list of the contents of Mr. Boyd's apartment which the police made the

day after the murder. Mr. Andrews! He didn't take any winter clothes at all! But a lot of his summer things that I can remember were missing—that light greenish suit and that powder-blue sport coat. And they didn't find his Panama hat in his room."

Her voice was low, almost a whisper. "Do you think he could have faked being on that Montreal train and come back and started for—South America?"

"I think we'd better let that matter drop for a moment and see what we can do with the Bigelow issue," Tony replied.

The guard was returning.

That was Tuesday.

A whole week passed.

The days went slowly for Tony, but not so slowly as those that had preceded, because he was now constantly expectant of news from Leslie Boyd. He felt certain that somewhere Boyd was working with his brilliant energy to solve the crime.

Then Tony received a shock.

On the eleventh day of his incarceration the Commissioner himself appeared at the door of Tony's cell and was let in. He looked, Tony thought, unsure of himself and almost embarrassed. He said, "I've got news for you."

Tony waited.

"We've found Boyd."

Tony jumped up. "And—?"

"I came down here to express the department's chagrin, personally."

Tony had been right. Good old Les!

"He killed himself yesterday."

Tony sat down again, his face blank, his feelings numb. "Killed himself?"

"A farmer found Boyd's body this morning. It was lying just outside David Cole's summer house at Elkhorn Lake in the Adirondacks."

"But—!" Tony closed his mouth.

The Commissioner's eyes showed amusement. "You were going to tell me that Les Boyd was all packed to go South, weren't you? That was a mighty clever piece of work you did with Miss Jones, or Temple, or whatever her name is. We wouldn't have known about it if we hadn't kept good track of the girl. We heard her talking to her reporter friend and checked up on Boyd's clothes ourselves—"

Tony shrugged. "All right," he said quietly. "I'm a bum detective. Suppose you tell me just exactly what happened."

"Boyd blew a hole through himself with a shotgun some time last night. A big hole. He

fell in the snow, and his body was frozen when the farmer found it. The farmer decided to look around the Cole place when he saw a light burning in the basement. Boyd had been hiding up there for several days, evidently. They found lots of empty cans and a bed and blankets where he had slept, as well as one other thing that I'll tell you about later."

Tony shook his head. "You can't tell me that Les Boyd killed Dave Cole and then went up to Cole's place in the Adirondacks and committed suicide. It doesn't make sense. He wasn't that kind of guy."

The Commissioner's face expressed a combination of pity and disdain for so credulous a person as Tony. "If you'd had as much to do with murder as I have, you'd know that a man can look like one thing all his life and be another. Besides, Boyd was plainly a pretty dizzy figure. A rich bachelor—love affairs—that collection of emeralds—an early life of busting around the world in all kinds of adventures and scrapes.

"No, Andrews. It doesn't do any good to deny facts. Boyd decided to kill Cole. He got hold of your knife so that you'd be implicated and clear his trail. He went over to Cole's house and did the job. Then he called you up and locked you

in. Being locked in that apartment with a dead body was supposed to get your wind up, throw you into a panic, make you leave fingerprints, or yell for help. Before help came he removed the chairs so that nobody would believe you had been locked in."

The Commissioner cleared his throat. "After Boyd called you, and just before you arrived at the apartment—maybe when you were being announced by ringing that bell—Boyd called us, so that there would be policemen on the scene to catch you. Then he went out—maybe down the fire escape from the window in the top-floor hall—and ordered his bags sent down to the station. It was a dandy trap for you!

"Now, look at his getaway. He has his bags put on a Montreal train. But his bags are full of summer clothes. That's where he was too slick. He figured that we would find out he was packed for the South, and therefore that we would look for him in the South. It just happens that we weren't bright enough to do that. He actually goes North, but he messes up that trail, too. Do you get it now?"

Tony nodded slowly, the completeness of the Commissioner's diagnosis overcoming his feelings. "Sure, I get it. He

actually went up to the Adirondack camp but he left what looked like a slip—to lead the trail South.”

The Commissioner shook his head. “He did better than that. He didn’t dare stay on that train. He might be nailed by a fluke if anybody saw him. But nobody did—really. His berth was made and his bags were in it. He handed out the ticket through the curtains when the train started. He wanted to disappear, and that was easy, because he had never appeared, really. If he had, we would have found his bags. But he could have opened his window and tossed them into the Harlem River. He could have hopped off the train without them anywhere above 125th Street—by opening the doors, letting himself out, and slamming them after him.

“There was a blizzard that night, remember, and the train was going along by fits and starts. He could have come back into the New York station by subway and taken another train going north, or he could have picked up an automobile and driven. What he did is not important. The fact is that he left the train to break the trail. We were supposed to think he was going north on that train. Then we were supposed to find out about his bags being packed

with summer clothes and start looking for him in the South.

“Just how and when he actually went to Cole’s summer place doesn’t matter. That’s the dope. But he lost his nerve, and after he had done what he intended to do, he blew a big hole through his backbone with a load of buckshot.”

Tony swallowed. “Just what did he intend to do? Why did he go to the house on Elkhorn Lake? Why did he kill Dave?”

“We won’t ever know all of that,” the Commissioner answered. “Boyd went up to Elkhorn Lake to destroy the evidence of his motive for the murder. He used the fireplace to burn a sheaf of papers. We found what was left unburned because it was held together by one of those heavy metal clips. Thirty-seven pages written in pen and ink on the stationery of the Oregon Central Lumber & Douglas Fir Corporation.

“The rest of it was ashes. And those ashes are the secret of why Boyd killed David Cole. Cole had something on him—a signed confession maybe, something that Boyd had written out and Cole kept. So Boyd killed Cole and went up to the house in the Adirondacks where the document was kept, and found it and destroyed it. Then he lost his nerve and shot himself.”

The Police Commissioner

stood up. "I guess that's about all, Andrews. I certainly apologize for the days you've spent here. You can hardly blame us for arresting you after what Doyle and McCluskey saw. I suppose you could bring a suit for false arrest. But I wish you wouldn't do it. In the first place, you might not win the suit. In the second place, you're in a spot now where if you ever need a favor from the police department you will only have to take up your telephone."

"I wasn't thinking of suing," Tony answered absent-mindedly.

The Commissioner sagged for an instant with relief and then clasped Tony's hand. "Fine! Fine! Splendid! Any time we can be of service to you—"

He walked toward the door of the cell and out. The door was not closed behind him. Tony looked at it without seeing it and then heard the Commissioner's booming voice: "Come on, old man! You've done your time! Don't tell me you're stir-daffy."

Tony grinned and walked out of his cell. He wasn't stir-daffy. He was thinking—thinking furiously and purposefully. The newspapers would print the story and the public would accept it. Leslie Boyd had murdered David Cole and

implicated Tony Andrews, and made a getaway and finally killed himself, after destroying some sort of confession which David Cole had in his possession. It was about that "confession" that Tony was thinking.

More than a year ago Tony, himself, had gone out to Oregon to look over a property. A lumber property. Sitting in an office in Portland, Oregon, Tony had written by hand a report of that property to David Cole. He had written it on the stationery of the Oregon Central Lumber & Douglas Fir Corporation. He had fastened the report together with a heavy metal paper clip. He had sent the report to Cole by air mail. He had numbered the pages in the report, and there had been exactly thirty-seven.

Thus the document burned beyond reclaim, the document that was supposed to contain the motive for the murder of Cole by Les Boyd, was not a confession at all! It was no more than a business report. Les Boyd would not have taken the trouble to burn it for any sensible reason whatever. It had probably been carried to Cole's summer place in a brief case by Cole himself and filed away, to be forgotten.

Tony went outdoors. The midday sun was shining and its

light was unbearably blinding. He hailed a cab and gave the address of his apartment. All the way uptown he was thinking hard. Why did Boyd burn that report?

He had not used the paper to start a log fire, for then even the portion of it held by the clip would have been consumed. There wasn't anything in that report which concerned Les in any way.

Pedro heard Tony's key in the door and opened it and smiled.

"I want a tub full of hot water," Tony said, as he took off his coat. "And hot coffee and toast that doesn't bend when you pick it up by one corner. Call up my secretary and tell her to come here with the mail and everything else that's important. I won't go down to the office until tomorrow."

Tony reached the stage where soap and water have done their appointed tasks and a man merely takes his ease beneath the restful patter of a warm spray. He gave sudden voice while in this position: "Holy mackerel!"

A simple and rather obvious explanation of the burned papers had just occurred to him.

Its implications were appalling.

Suppose somebody else had burned that report to make it look as if Les Boyd's motive for killing Cole was to be forever unknown.

Tony had imagined that Les was on the trail of Cole's murderer. But suppose it was the other way around: suppose the murderer had trailed Les! Killed Les—put the shotgun in Les's hands, and burned the papers in a conspicuous place so that Les's suicide would seem motivated!

Suppose Les had been murdered to cover up the murder of Cole—to accomplish just what it had accomplished in the mind of the police.

Such a set of circumstances would have closed the case—had, in fact, closed it.

Tony was sure that he was right. Les Boyd had been murdered by the same man who had murdered Cole.

Tony gasped under a sudden deluge of cold water, toweled himself furiously, and went into his bedroom. As he began to put on his clothes, Pedro knocked on his door. "Miss Jones is outside."

He finished his dressing quickly. The girl was sitting on a sofa by the fireplace, and when he came out she stood up. "I'm terribly glad—"

Tony grinned. "Me, too. Are you all ready to work?"

She opened her brief case. 'You bet I am! And I hope you are. Smithson is wild to see you. Williams is down in the office talking to Mr. Fletcher right now—'

She stopped because Tony was paying no attention to her. He had picked up a newspaper that she had been carrying. On the first page were headlines:

**LESLIE BOYD COMMITS
SUICIDE**

**WAS MURDERER OF
DAVID COLE**

Andrews Released

Tony glanced through the story. He tossed the paper back on the sofa. 'Look, Wanda. I didn't mean business. I meant work on this—' He pointed at the paper. 'It wasn't a confession that Les Boyd burned, and he didn't burn it.'

He told her rapidly about his deductions, finishing with the words, 'Whoever was up there was also the person in Dave's apartment the night we were there. The murderer. What I want to do—'

She interrupted him excitedly, '—is to check everybody's alibi for last night and the day before! Alavo's and mine and—' She broke off. 'But that wouldn't do any good, necessarily, would it?'

'I hadn't thought of it,' Tony answered rapidly. 'My idea was for you and me to go

over everything that happened the night of Dave's murder. To see if we could remember anything that would throw some new light on this. But why not check the alibis? Why wouldn't the easiest thing be to find who was out of town yesterday, when Les was shot?'

Wanda looked frightened. 'I was just thinking—'

'Thinking what?'

'Thinking that the paper said Mr. Boyd's body was frozen. And I was wondering if that didn't mean he could have been dead for days. If a person is frozen, can even a medical man be sure how long he's been dead?'

Tony stared at his secretary. 'You mean Boyd might have been lying up there for days?'

'It's possible. Why don't you call up a doctor and ask him? Because if it was done a week ago, for example, it would be pretty hard to check anybody's alibi.'

Tony picked up the phone and called his own doctor. He explained swiftly that this question must be regarded as an inviolable confidence. The doctor's reply confirmed Wanda's suggestion: 'I presume you are talking about Boyd, Tony, but we will skip that. It crossed my mind when I read the papers this noon. How did the country doctor up in the Adirondacks

know the length of time Boyd had lain there if the body was frozen? Unless he had something like a recent cover of snow to go by, he couldn't possibly know. That is the answer. In a solidly frozen human body no deterioration takes place whatever and I'd defy any medical man to say whether a given individual had been in that condition for hours or for weeks."

Tony said, "Thanks," and hung up. He turned to Wanda. "You were right."

"We'd better tell the police."

He shook his head. "Not yet. Look here, Wanda. You and I know more about this man than anybody else alive. I've got a terrific feeling that—"

Her blonde head nodded. "I know! You feel that you can almost see who did it!"

"—and I want to think a little more about it—about the night Dave was killed. Just what happened. When did it happen? Whose story fails to check with what we know? Wanda!" His voice raised. "We ought to go back to Dave's apartment. We ought to go over the whole evening. Have Dave's things been moved?"

She shook her head. "The police sealed up the apartment as it was."

Tony again picked up the telephone and called the Police

Commissioner. "About that favor you promised me," he said.

The Commissioner's voice was hearty. "Anything from a low license number to getting your nephew out of jail."

"I want to go into Cole's apartment with my secretary, and I don't want Doyle and McCluskey peering in the window."

There was a pause. "If you've got something on this, Andrews, maybe you better tell me."

"If I get something, I will tell you."

By the time a man from headquarters arrived at Tony's apartment with the keys, the afternoon was nearly worn away. The two men and the girl drove down to West Ninth Street. The policeman opened the front door of the house and they filed upstairs.

On the door of the apartment itself there was a sign and a padlock. Again keys turned, and the door swung open. The policeman said, "Anything else?"

Tony thanked him. The policeman went down the stairs.

They stood together in Dave's living room and Wanda said, "Don't you think we had better turn on the lights first?"

He nodded. "All the ones that were on that night."

When floor and table lamps drove back the dusk, they could see the stain on the sofa and on the floor, dark brown now, and the ashes of the fire that had been burning in Cole's grate. In the bedroom the same suit with the same note pinned on it was still hanging on the bureau drawer. When they were satisfied that they had switched on the proper lights, they returned to the living room.

"Now," Tony said, "you watch me. I've knocked on the door." He walked toward it. "And now I come in." He halted. He said parenthetically. "It must have been about nine o'clock. The door wasn't answered. I unlocked it and walked in. Dave was lying there."

Tony acted out what he was saying. "Lying there just as if he had been doing one of his suspension presses—with a knife in his back... Let me see. I called Les." He called—once. "Les!"

He shrugged. "All right. No answer. I walked to the guest room." Wanda followed him as he went down the dark hall and switched on the guest room lights. "I took a squint into the closets here and moved on to Dave's room. I read the note to Mrs. Bunnell about the cleaners

and I counted the dough on the bureau. Five or six hundred dollars. Next I looked into the bathroom." He did so. "There were a couple of sloppy towels on the floor and a lot of water. Dave bathed like a sea lion.

"Then the kitchen. There wasn't anything out of order in it." He turned on the kitchen light and they gazed at that room. "So far so good. Let me think. I walked back into the living room to call the police."

He stepped aside and Wanda went ahead. His voice trailed her. "Now. I picked up the telephone. The wire's cut—see? I decided to go out and find the police. Wait a minute. I hadn't taken off my gloves. One of the first thoughts that crossed my mind was not to leave any fingerprints while I was investigating. When I went to the door it wouldn't open. So! Let's see if those chairs will jam the door."

They went into the hall and Tony put one of the Spanish chairs face down on the hall carpet. It fitted tightly between the door and the newel post of the stairs that led to the roof. "Now you do it and I'll go inside and try to push."

They made the experiment and Tony was unable to open the door. Wanda picked up the chair and put it back in its place. Tony came out.

"That's what did it, all right," he said. He glanced around the hall—at the ship wallpaper, the crimson carpet, the table, and the sizzling radiator. He smiled a little at Wanda. "Kind of scary, isn't it?"

Her eyes met his brightly. "It's the weirdest thing I ever did in my life. The feeling that you almost know exactly what happened is terribly intense, though."

He did not reply to that. "When I found I couldn't get out this door I tried the kitchen door. Come on." They went through the house. "It was double-locked. Then back into the living room. I was absolutely positive that Dave's murderer was still in the building—on account of the barricaded door, of course. When I came back from trying the kitchen door—right now, that is—I saw Dave's .45 on the table—here—loaded but not used."

"I stuck it in my pocket because I thought I might need it any minute. Then I saw that the *Register* was opened, to a story about me, and I knew it had been left there by Les. At least, it had his name and apartment number on it. The next thing I noticed was Señora Alavo's perfume, and I sniffed along this sofa."

He repeated his actions of

that night. "I knew the perfume was familiar but I couldn't remember whose it was. I sat down and tried to think."

Wanda was standing opposite the sofa where Tony sat, her face earnest with concentration.

Tony went on: "It was while I was sitting here that it occurred to me that Dave looked as if he had been doing that suspension press. I smoked a cigarette and chucked my ashes in the grate so nobody would look for my brand of cigarettes. I saw Loretta's handkerchief in the other sofa, and I burned it."

"Then I realized the knife in Dave's back was just like my own. I felt compelled to look at this one. So I did. It was just about this time that McCluskey and Doyle reached the balcony by the front window and began to watch."

He got down on one knee over the spot where Dave had been lying. "It was my knife, but discovering that wasn't any comfort. If I hadn't thought I was still locked in, I might have walked out with it—perhaps. But while I knelt here I felt cold air on my back—"

"—and I came in," Wanda said.

Tony stood up. "You will never know how relieved I was to see you. When I felt that cold air I thought my last day had arrived."

For a moment they looked at each other, smiling. And then suddenly Tony started. "Cold air! Was it cold in the hall?"

She frowned, and finally nodded. "It was quite cold. The bottom hall was warm but it got colder as I went up the stairs. That fits with what the police said. The murderer got away by opening the hall window and going down the fire escape."

Tony was shaking his head. "Even on a night like that, opening and shutting a window wouldn't let in enough cold air to chill a couple of halls. It was hotter than Tophet"—he stalked across the room and opened the front door of the apartment—"hotter than blazes out here when I came up. The radiator was steaming away just as it is now. Look!"

He rushed down the hall to a window. Outside was the iron fire escape. He opened the window, ducked his head, climbed out on the fire escape, and came back into the hall, shutting the window behind him. A little eddy of cold air had blown through the window, but when they walked back to Dave's door it was still warm in the hall.

Wanda looked back toward the fire escape. "But if the cold air didn't come from that window—"

Suddenly and in horror she drew her breath. She had noticed the direction of Tony's eyes. He was looking up the staircase to the roof.

"I don't think the papers ever made any report of an investigation of that roof."

He started slowly up the stairs. When his head and shoulders came in contact with the trap door to the roof he unhooked it and pushed hard. It lifted. He climbed up the rest of the stairs and held down his hand for Wanda.

The pink glow of the streets was reflected dimly on the winter-swept roof. Iron benches, chairs, tables, flower urns, and flower boxes were barely visible. Snow was heaped over shapeless lumps.

Tony stood there for a moment, and then walked over to the wall around the edge of the roof and looked down.

"It would be a cinch to drop from here to the fire escape," he said slowly.

Tony's gaze rested on the formless lumps of snow which marked the positions of summer furniture.

"Are you thinking the same thing I am?" he asked.

Her voice was choked. "I'm thinking that Leslie Boyd could have been murdered that night and carried up here—"

Tony took her hand. "Car-

ried up here," he repeated rapidly. "The snow would have covered him in a few minutes! His body would have looked like another one of these flower boxes. And he'd have frozen, Wanda! It was bitter-cold!"

"Then what?" she whispered.

"The murderer," Tony replied, "has had eleven nights to come back here and get that frozen body and drive it up to David Cole's house in the Adirondacks! Listen, Wanda! It could have stayed here frozen till now, even, as far as that goes. It's been cold right along.

"If Les came into Dave's apartment and found him dead, and the murderer was hiding there and killed Les, too, he could easily have brought him up here. Brought him here and then taken him miles away—" His voice sank. "Thawed out the body and used the shotgun—to erase a stab wound just like the one in Dave's back! Then he could have left the body to freeze again."

"But why didn't the police look up here?" Wanda asked.

"They probably did come up and take a look around. Late that night, or the morning after the murder. If we're right, Les's body was here then. But whoever brought it here could have covered it, and his own tracks, and the gale that night

would have blown all the surfaces smooth in ten minutes.

"The cops came up here and saw nothing, which is understandable. Besides, they were sure they had their man. They'd seen me with that knife in my hand—through the front window. They weren't looking for anything else. If they'd been a little more thorough"—he glanced around the roof—"they might have found—"

"Let's go down," she whispered.

Tony murmured, "It would have been as simple as that!"

He helped her down the staircase and closed the trapdoor. Once more they were standing in front of Cole's apartment.

"The hall's cold now, isn't it?" she said.

She shuddered from head to foot.

He nodded and opened the door to Dave's apartment again. "I'm sure of it now, Wanda. Les Boyd wouldn't have burned that report of mine for any reason in the world. So somebody else did. Les wouldn't have killed himself. Somebody did that to transfer guilt for the murder of Cole—which that person had already committed.

"Les wasn't out hunting for the murderer for the past eleven days. He was lying dead, and his

body was kept just as it was for all that time because it was frozen. He was lying up here on the roof for a while and then in the Adirondacks. It would have been a cinch to get Les's body down that fire escape from the roof and into an automobile. Anybody who saw the thing would have thought Les was a drunk."

Wanda said uncomfortably, "I guess you've got something to tell the Commissioner now."

Tony's head moved negatively. "An idea, but nothing to back it up. If my idea is right, and two murders were done in this room that night, there should have been signs of two murders. Up there on the roof I assumed that Les was stabbed, but he might have been struck over the head, for example."

Tony's eyes moved toward the sofa. "If the murderer had heard Les coming up the stairs and jumped behind that seat—if Les had come in and telephoned me and the police, and sat down opposite Dave to wait for me—"

Thoughtfully he walked to the spot where he had found David Cole lying face down with outstretched arms. He looked at that spot. He gazed from there along the stained carpet to the larger stain on the back of the sofa.

"I don't suppose it ever

occurred to the police to do blood tests," he said slowly.

Half understanding him, she murmured, "What do you mean?"

"Suppose the blood here on the sofa was Les's blood?"

"But—?"

In a low tone, acting as he talked, Tony explained. "Let's assume that I am the murderer. I kid Dave into showing me he can still do a suspension press. I stab him. That's easy. While I am still kneeling I hear somebody come up the stairs, or perhaps ring the bell. I have just used the knife, so I snatch it and jump behind the sofa. Les comes in, sees Dave, walks over to the phone, and calls. Then he seats himself on the sofa to wait."

"But," interrupted Wanda, "how did Mr. Boyd get into the apartment? The murderer wouldn't have opened the door for him."

"Les kept a set of keys to Dave's place. Dave gave me a set, too. He wanted us to feel we could drop in and use his place any time. Les must have rung the bell and got no answer, and decided to come in and wait till Dave came home."

"Yes, I see."

Tony crouched behind the sofa. He pointed at the stain on its back. "Les has made his phone calls and is sitting right

here and I am directly behind him with my knife in my hand. I know that a third person as well as the police will be on the scene in a few minutes. I've got to get away before they come, but if Les sees me, it is all over for me. I realize that he is going to sit there and wait. All I have to do is reach over the top of this thing to kill him.

"You can't hang any harder for two murders than for one, but as I crouch here it dawns on me that if I can make it look as if one man had killed the other and then committed suicide, I can forever divert suspicion from myself. And now look, Wanda. I stab Les."

Tony made a gesture so realistically that the girl winced. "That makes the stain. I move Les over to where Dave is lying. It's simple, isn't it? Everyone will assume that Dave was stabbed on the sofa and fell forward on the floor, leaving a trail of blood. It'll look like one murder only. I have already decided how and where I can hide Les's body for a long time. On the roof in the snow. I put the knife back in Dave's body and I pick up Boyd—and the rest we know."

Wanda frowned. "There's one thing, though. Why did the murderer barricade you in with those chairs? We've thought all along it was to pin the crime on

you. But if he had already set the scene to make Mr. Boyd look like the murderer, why did he want to incriminate you, too?"

Tony considered. "Oh, gosh! I suppose we'll never know the truth of all this." He leaned against a chair despondently.

"Maybe it was this way," Wanda said slowly. "You arrived long before the police. Suppose the murderer was just carrying Mr. Boyd up the stairs to the roof when he heard you coming. He wouldn't have time to get out through the trap door—it's heavy and awkward and he was—he was carrying something." She stopped short, looking very white.

"Of course," Tony carried on her suggestion, exactly. "So he hid on the stairs to the roof until I had gone into Dave's apartment and then barred the door with the chairs to keep me from coming out and catching him before he had finished. After he had Les's body on the roof and covered with snow, he came back and took the chairs away."

Wanda asked for a cigarette. Her hand trembled. "And how about the other phone call—to the hotel?"

Tony glanced at her quickly. "Other phone call? That's right! Les called his hotel and ordered his bags sent to that Montreal

train! That doesn't make very good sense—unless—unless—it was the murderer who called the hotel. We can ask the hotel clerk if he definitely recognized the voice. And that's important! Because if it was the murderer who called, *then the murderer knew that Les had packed his bags!*"

Their eyes met. "That's right," she answered slowly. "If the murderer telephoned the hotel, he probably got on the train himself for a little while, and handed out the tickets and disposed of the bags, and got off the train as soon as possible."

Tony said, "Let's go up and talk to the hotel clerk."

"At least," she said, "what the Commissioner believes—it simply couldn't have happened—on account of that burned report. And what we are imagining certainly *could* have happened—if the man who killed Dave was very clever."

They began to turn out the lights in the apartment. Tony called sharply. "Why a 'man'?"

There was blankness in her voice. "A woman—?"

"If we are right—why not? Cole was killed while he was lying face down on the floor. A woman could have done it. Les was stabbed in the back when he didn't realize there was another person in the apart-

ment. A woman could have done that. And as for carrying Les Boyd's body up the stairs to the roof—Les didn't even weigh a hundred pounds. You could have done it. And you have a husky voice. You could make the hotel clerk think you were a man!"

The clerk at the Brail Hotel who had taken the order that sent Les Boyd's two suitcases to the railroad station gave them grounds for a reasonable doubt.

"I don't remember the voice much. It's noisy in the lobby. It was just a voice—but I'll tell you, Mr. Boyd always used to say, 'This is Boyd-14-B.' Now, some people say, 'This is Mr. Norman K. Jones,' or others say, 'This is Mrs. Wilson of Apartment So-and-so.' Whoever spoke that night said, 'This is Boyd-14-B,' so I naturally assumed it was Boyd."

Tony and Wanda went out into the street. "It's half-past seven," he said. "Will you have supper?"

"Yes."

There was a long silence between them as they rode in a taxicab, a silence that was broken finally when he murmured, "A man or a woman—somebody who was well enough acquainted with Dave to know he could be kidded into doing that suspension press. Some-

body who knew Les so well that he or she could telephone exactly the way Les did. Someone who knew about Dave's summer place."

He chuckled mirthlessly. "That means you—"

"I didn't get on the train, and you know it. I was with you."

He chuckled mirthlessly again.

"You made two telephone calls that night, though. Before and after the few minutes we spent at the movies. One could have been to get Les's bags sent to the train and the other could have been to have somebody take care of the train ride itself. You could have done it if you had had an accomplice. For that matter, so could I if I had had somebody to take care of that train ride. But, for that matter—"

He hesitated a moment and went on: "—so could Pedro. He had some kind of grudge against Cole. He could have left the house that evening when Les came in to talk to me, because I didn't see him again until morning, and in the eleven days I was in jail he could easily have transported the body to the Adirondacks."

"I don't think Pedro would have done such a—"

"Neither do I," Tony replied. The cab stopped in front

of a restaurant. "But I'm just trying to show you that, if we are right about what happened, it still could have conceivably been done by not only you or me or Pedro, but by Loretta, or Jack—he was home alone that night, and she said she was at the theater—or by either one of the Alavos—or by any one of an unknown number of absolute strangers."

The doorman pushed open the restaurant door. "Even if we do know *how*, we still don't know *who*." She stood beside him as he checked his coat and a headwaiter walked smilingly toward them. "So I haven't got anything at all to tell the Commissioner yet, and I don't think we will ever find out exactly which person knew that Boyd was going South and could use that knowledge about the luggage, because obviously disclosing that would give away the person who did know it."

Tony was following her among upturned faces, talking to Wanda's back. "In consequence of which dilemma I think I'll try a little notion on *all* the possible suspects. It is a good notion but I'll probably find myself back in the Tombs for slander or whatever it is."

"What's your idea?" she asked as they sat down.

He shook his head. "I won't tell you unless it works. Now,

let's forget all about it. Let's have the best dinner obtainable, and afterward I'm going to send you home." He looked at the menu.

She wanted to ask questions, but she saw that he was determined not to talk any more about the deaths of his partners. She was glad, in a way. She hoped that he would talk to her about himself and herself. He did . . .

Wanda was waiting in his office at 9:30 when he appeared. He was excited. He clapped his hands together when he came through the door. He had a black eye. Wanda stared at the black eye.

"Part of my idea," he said in reply to her unasked question. "We can cross Señor Alavo off our list, Wanda. Furthermore, he evened up things for that sock in the jaw I gave him."

She waited for him to say more but he did not, so she handed him the mail. He glanced through it quickly. "I want to talk this over with Jack Raymond. Tell him to come in. I persuaded Jack to take a Turkish bath with me last night, by the way."

Her eyes were suddenly alarmed but he shook his head. "We only talked about business. However, I'm going to leave the intercom open and I want you

to listen at the other end." Her face was white and questioning. He shrugged. "Maybe I am just going to get another black eye."

She went out.

Jack entered, sat down, and smiled.

Tony got out of his chair and half sat on his desk. "You killed Dave with my knife, Jack," he said crisply. "Then you killed Les. You carried him up that dark stairway and hid with him while I came up. You blocked the door with a chair while you got him out on the roof. Then you went home. You didn't have time to take the short ride on the Montreal train, so you persuaded somebody else to do it. Loretta? It doesn't matter. In one of the last eleven nights you took a trip with the body up to the Adirondacks and you made a murder look like a suicide by burning a sheaf of papers and using a shotgun to destroy a stab wound"

Jack sat still. Tony's first words had erased his smile, but now it was on his face again, changed somewhat. "Just why did I do all these things, Tony?"

Tony hunched himself up on his desk. "Loretta said that you were broke. That you gambled. She said that she was trying to marry Dave, or me, to save the family from ruin. I thought she

was kidding. She wasn't. You handle enough of this firm's properties to embezzle a good deal of money—a good deal without being caught; but if you've taken any, maybe you've put it back now. I haven't looked into the records. Dave probably had. You killed him to keep him from telling us."

Jack's smile was still unabashed. "You've thought up a very fancy nightmare, Tony. You certainly don't intend to make such a charge seriously?"

"I intend to."

Then Jack stopped smiling. "I suppose you can prove it?"

Tony reached in his pocket. Jack's hand slid quickly toward his own pocket, but Tony produced no weapon. He dropped two small objects on his desk.

"Here's a button from the suit you were wearing that night, and a little black notebook from your vest pocket. I haven't had time to dry the notebook out, you may notice. It fell into the snow on the roof of Dave Cole's house. The button was on the staircase to the roof. Funny you haven't missed the notebook."

For an instant Jack's eyes stared. "I could have sworn I had it yesterday—" He reached into his hip pocket then and pulled out a revolver. His voice

was low in its intensity. "Hand over the button and the notebook. Then come along with me."

"Where?"

"While Loretta and I pack." He pointed the gun steadily. "We'll tie you up and put you in a closet, where they'll find you in a day or so."

Jack was smiling once again, and his third smile was an expression Tony had never seen—a deadly expression.

Jack said quietly, "I don't need to tell you that I'll use this if I have to—do I?" He put the gun in his pocket, still keeping it pointed at Tony. "It was clever work to figure all that out, Tony. Yes, I did it. And I helped myself to the firm's funds. Dave only found out through a fluke."

"Tell me one thing," said Tony. "Where was Les going that night? Why were his bags packed for a Southern trip? And how did you know they were packed?"

"He told me. He was determined to stop this quarrel between you and Dave at any cost—even the cost of a trip to South America to check on your findings about the bond issue. He didn't tell you or Dave because he was afraid you'd try to stop him. But he had his bags packed, ready to leave that night, if you two couldn't patch

things up... That was one thing you couldn't find out, for all your detective work. And you've made one mistake. You should have had some witnesses to this little scene."

Very delicately Tony tapped the top of his intercom. "I have." He leaned down a little. "Wanda! Bring everybody in here."

For a second Jack was silent and motionless. Then he said, "I wish you'd do everything you can for Loretta. Keep her out of it. She didn't know why she carried out my orders for her about the Montreal train until the next day."

Tony said, "All right, Jack."

Then the door opened. Wanda was there, with others behind her... The shot made surprisingly little noise, because Jack had pressed the muzzle of his gun close to his body...

Tony and Wanda sat in another taxicab riding toward the Police Commissioner's office.

"He'll be furious." She referred to the Commissioner. "Why didn't you tell him that you had found the button and the notebook?"

He turned toward her. "Because I hadn't. The button was from one of my own suits. It was just an ordinary black one—and I stole the notebook out of his vest last night at the Turkish bath."

They rode a little longer. There was relief on their faces. Presently she looked up at him with a shadowy smile. "You're terribly clever, aren't you? I guess the best brains do go into business. The first time you dictated that speech I thought it was kind of funny, but now—"

Tony shook his head, and his grin appeared. "If I had brains I would have had the firm's books secretly audited ten days ago." He took her hand and patted it. "If I had brains I would have figured Loretta out sooner for what she is. If I had any brains whatever I would have paid more attention to a gray-eyed, silver-blond girl about twenty-five years old named Miss Jones. I mean—Miss Temple."

"You've been calling her Wanda for the last day."

"Have I? Good for me! Maybe I have some sense, after all!"



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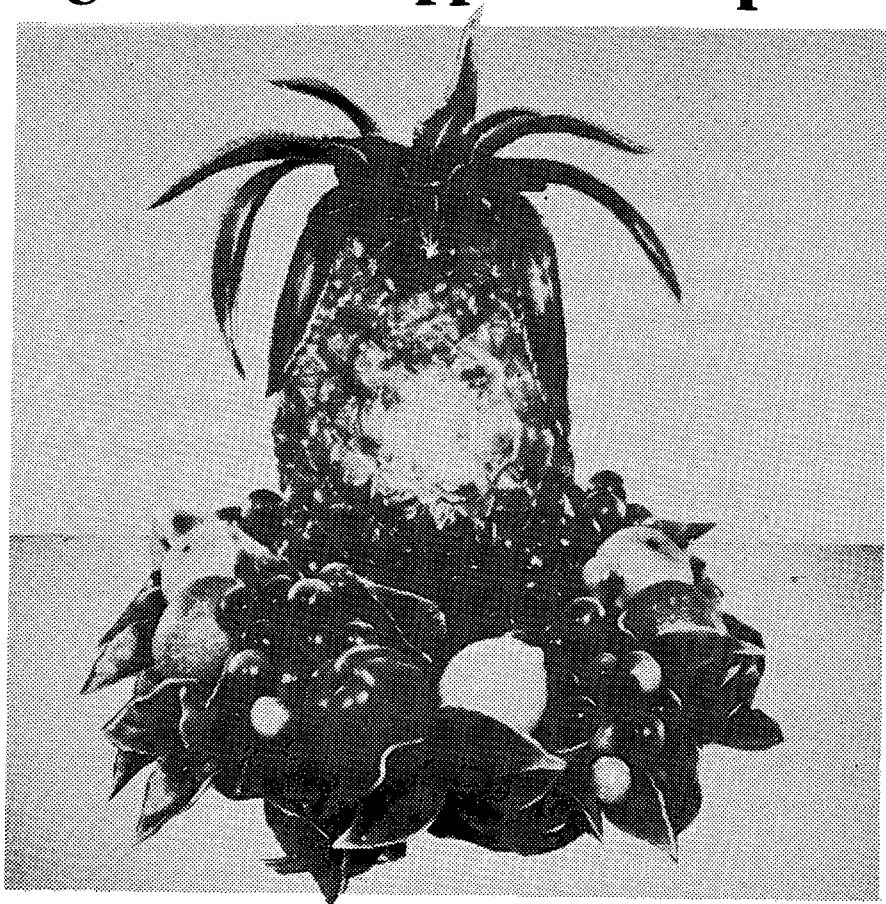
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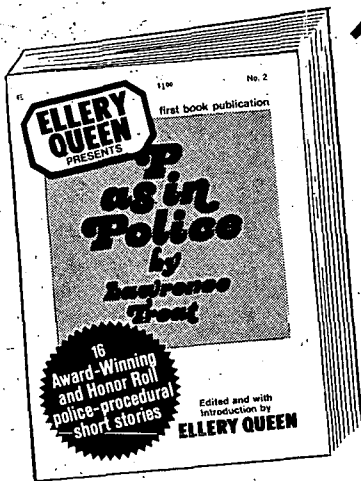
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